

His lips trembled, and kneeling down he laid his bundle on the floor, and dropped arms and face into his mother's lap.

Graham Mceall's Victory;

@ tale

OF THE COVENANTERS.

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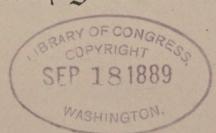
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"A REAL HERO — GOLD OR GLORY?" "SILVERDALE RECTORY," "ONLY A TRAMP,"

"FUN AND FAIRIES," ETC.

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CONTENTS.

CHAP.			PAGE
I.	ONE OF THE FEW WHO WERE KILLED	. 4	9
II.	THE TWO COVENANTS		23
III.	WHO BEGAN IT?		30
IV.	IVIE MCCALL		44
v.	A REMINDER FOR CHARLES II		53
VI.	A TRAITOR IN THE HEART OF THE CAMP		59
VII.	"MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL AT STIRLING	"	71
VIII.	DARK TIMES		81
IX.	A MYSTERIOUS VISITOR		87
x.	A VENICE FLASK OF PERFUME		98
. XI.	THE NEW BISHOP OF DUNBLANE .		114
XII.	A PAIR OF FRIENDS		129
XIII.	WILLIAM BLAIR OFFERS A CHOICE .		136
XIV.	TASTING SORROW FOR THE CAUSE .		142
xv.	"WITH WORSE TO FOLLOW"		159
XVI.	A LATE VISITOR		170
XVII.	CALM BEFORE THE STORM		184
XVIII.	A CONVENTICLE DISTURBED		188
XIX.	HOW MCCALL DID THE DRAGOONS' BIDDIN	IG	198
XX.	HENRY SAVILE TO THE RESCUE		208
XXI.	IN THE BLAIRS' KITCHEN		216

CHAP.				PAGE
XXII.	ROUSED AT LAST			231
XXIII.	TURNING THE TABLES			236
XXIV.	GENERAL THOMAS DALZIEL			246
xxv.	MARY BLAIR LEAVES TOO SOON			252
XXVI.	ALAS!			265
XXVII.	LEARNING THE NEWS			278
XXVIII.	IVIE MCCALL BEFORE THE JUDGES			286
XXIX.	OLD ELSPETH'S PRISONER			294
XXX.	NOT A ROMAN MATRON, BUT A CHRISTIA	AN		307
XXXI.	KING CHARLES'S MOOD			314
XXXII.	"BUT BY STEALTH, FOR FEAR"			320
XXXIII.	THE BEST OF THE CHEESE INSIDE			323
XXXIV.	ELSPETH SPENCE SPEAKS HER MIND .			334
xxxv.	THREE TAPS AT THE DOOR			344
XXXVI.	NOT THE MIND OF CHRIST			363
XXXVII.	"BECAUSE YE HAVE BETRAYED THE CHU	RCE	Ι,	
	AS JUDAS"			370
XXXVIII.	"THE CAMERONIANS"			378





GRAHAM MCCALL'S VICTORY.

CHAPTER I.

ONE OF THE FEW WHO WERE KILLED.



DREARY, marshy spot, a few miles from Lochgarry. The time, night; and a man stretched on the chill, damp ground, dying of his wounds. The year—1653.

A few hours ago an engagement had been fought on the banks of the loch, between a detachment of Cromwell's army under Generals Monk and Morgan on the one side, and Middleton and Glencairn, fighting for the exile son of the beheaded King, on the other. And the Protector's forces gained the day.

"General Morgan pressed so hard that the King's army ran as fast as they could, and in great confusion. But there was no great slaughter, as night came on soon after they were engaged."

The historian gives us that small off-hand bit of

information as to there being no great slaughter. Of course he could not stop to make a moan over the dozen or so men who happened to be of those few who had been slain. The widows and orphans must do that in the desolated homes, where things were no less sad because they happened to be the only ones picked out to endure this bitter misery.

However, at that midnight hour none of the bereaved had as yet had time to learn of the encounter that had taken place, much less to glean any of the attendant particulars. Graham McCall lay dying out on that marshy moor, and his sweet-voiced, gentle young wife, Kate, lay sleeping peacefully with their little child, Ivie, in her arms; never even in her dreams imagining what was befalling her husband, nor that the place she had been fain to fill beside him, at that solemn hour, was occupied by a rough soldier, not even a fellow-countryman.

Graham McCall had joined Lord Glencairn's standard because he was earnest to fulfil what he regarded as his bounden religious duty, to fight for his covenanted King. But the army of Charles was composed of very diverse elements. A considerable number of the Scotchmen in it were actuated simply by loyalty to the grandson of their King, James the Sixth; some by dislike to Cromwell; others again were there from the noble and unselfish motives that influenced McCall; and the men who had recently come over from the Continent under Middleton, himself a soldier of fortune from the Thirty Years' War, were for the

most part Englishmen fighting for English Royalty, and for the gaiety, liberality, and brilliancy that they promised themselves should be attendant on a future English Court.

The two companion fugitives from the luckless affray at Lochgarry were representatives of the extremes in the Royalist army. Graham McCall, with his strong religious convictions, and the blameless life with which he adorned his profession as a follower of his Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The other, a young cousin of Middleton's, scarcely more than a boy, but a very giant for size and strength, and already, unhappily, as much given to drinking and swearing as any of his comrades on his side of the camp.

He thought to prove his manliness and good comradeship by his aptness as a pupil in these sins, but he would have been a really fine fellow, and one of those marked out to leave a famous name behind him, if he had not thus cruelly blighted his own life. An expression of the most true and honest sympathy rested on his countenance now as he bent low over the dying laird, trying to discover by the moon's misty light whether he were still conscious.

"Savile?" came the low breathing of his own name by way of answer to the scrutiny.

"Mais oui donc," was the reply in a quick tone of relief. And then, with as quick correction of himself: "Your pardon. I have been so long over yonder jabbering French that I have well-nigh lost the

proper aptitude of my own tongue, it seems. You are feeling better, I trust? You will yet pull through, I hope, and be soon nursed back to strength by that wife and youngster Ivie you are so fond of speaking of."

A momentary gleam of returning brightness came into the large, dim blue eyes, as accompaniment to the words: "Nay, my friend, I am dying. I am going to the everlasting home, where One awaits me who is even dearer than my dear wife and child."

The failing of the voice, and increased pallor, told the young soldier all too plainly that his passing hope was indeed a vain one, but, with the instinctive craving to prolong life, he pulled a most fantasticlooking but beautiful glass flask from his pocket, and taking out the engraved and twisted stopper he put it to the chill white lips, whilst a subtle fragrance filled the whole air around.

The contents certainly appeared to possess some potent charm, for the mouth of the flask had scarcely touched the dying man's lips before he revived wonderfully, and his appearance might have deceived even those far more experienced than Henry Savile into hopes for his recovery. But it did not deceive himself.

"Hope for this world is over for me," he said tranquilly, "and I am content to die. My present rally I believe is due as much to that wonderful aroma as to what I have tasted; the scent seems to penetrate me as it has done the air."

The young officer smiled with a touch of pride in his possession, as he lifted it high for its sheeny hues to catch the pale light of the moonbeams. "I have travelled somewhat," he said. "This was given to me by a strange old sage last year, in Florence. I gave him a pull out of the midst of a rabble mob one day, and in return he bestowed this boon on me, saying that it was of a potency almost to bring the dead to life again."

Graham McCall closed his eyes for a moment, and then, half-raising his feeble right hand, he repeated with an impressive slowness:

"'Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.' That is the Christian's cordial, my friend, and it hath in it this of unspeakable and precious gloriousness, that it is bestowed upon us with no assurance of being 'almost' a gift to bring us life, but a certainty: 'He that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.' Not 'perhaps,' not 'almost'—he 'shall.'"

The young giant shrugged his broad shoulders with something of the foreign air he had acquired in foreign parts. His customary off-hand reckle sness was returning now that the immediate cause for anxiety was fading at any rate from his superficial view.

"It passes me to understand," he said, in a tone of mingled pity and contempt; "it utterly passes me to understand how you can keep to this child's faith of yours now, when you see everything that you have valued and striven for trampled underfoot or destroyed. Cromwell's uncovenanted soldiers oust your favourite ministers from their pulpits, in order to mount thither themselves, pistols in their hands and swords by their sides. Is it not so?'

"It is even so," was the quiet assent.

Henry Savile continued: "And then for your General Assembly. See what happened to that but last July. It had but just met when Colonel Cotterel beset the church, wherein the members were gathered, with some rattes of musketeers and a troop of horse. Himself entered the church after your Moderator had made his prayer, required audience, and inquired whether the meeting sat there by authority of the Parliament of the Commonwealth of England, or of the Commander-in-Chief of the English forces, or of the English Judges in Scotland. And when the Moderator replied that there was no question there of anything of that sort, that it was an ecclesiastical synod, a spiritual court of Jesus Christ, the Colonel said he had orders to dissolve it, and unless all the members instantly followed him they should be dragged out of the building."

The young soldier paused a moment to utter a scornful laugh, as he said: "Ha, ha! I just fancy I see them. Cotterel did it well while he was about it. He led all the solemn-faced individuals composing your wind-up General Assembly through the whole streets of Edinburgh and a mile beyond, with the troops

guarding them all about; and then, calling a halt at last, he told them that they were never to dare to meet again more than three together, and the next morning the whole of them were trumpeted out of the town. What do you say to that? Do you still tell me that you have this surpassing trust in infinite power and infinite love?"

The dying laird looked up with wondering pity at his questioner. "For all these afflictions our hearts are sad, our eyes run down with water. We sigh to God, against whom we have sinned, and we wait for the help of His hand."

Savile flung back his head with something of indignation as well as impatience. "Wait, indeed," he retorted; "you, for one, have had enough of waiting, it should appear. You have been faithful to your vow, faithful to your covenant, faithful to your covenanted King, faithful to your God, and what has your faithfulness brought you to! Deep and bitter disappointment for your country, your covenant, your King, and death for yourself, with a girl-wife and infant son to await what may befall them. Pray, what have you to wait for more?"

A sweet, calm smile rested upon the pale face. "What have I to wait for more!" he echoed. "You scarce ask as those ask who wish to know, yet will I nevertheless tell thee. For myself, I have but a short waiting until I pass onwards to the everlasting home, and joy unspeakable. And for the rest, our eyes wait upon the Lord our God, until that He have

mercy upon us. For since the beginning of the world men have not heard nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside Thee, what He hath prepared for him that waiteth for Him."

So sublime in its expression had the countenance of the wounded man become, whilst he was repeating this most glorious and comfortable of all possible confessions of faith, that the scoffing sceptic beside him was awed into a passing reverence.

"No amount of discouragement or adversity seems to quell the spirit and hope of you covenanters," he murmured in bewilderment, rather to himself than aloud; but the other caught the words, and answered them:

"How should it!" he ejaculated with the wonderful expression of peace deepening on his face. "One thousand shall flee at the rebuke of one; at the rebuke of five shall ye flee: till ye be left as a beacon upon the top of a mountain, and as an ensign on an hill. And therefore will the Lord wait, that He may be gracious unto you, and therefore will He be exalted that He may have mercy upon you: for the Lord is a God of judgment, blessed are all they that wait for Him! We have had the chastisement for our sins, according to the sure word of the Lord, who chasteneth every son whom He receiveth, and now we wait upon Him in the certain hope that we shall be partakers of His infinite loving mercy."

Henry Savile slowly shook his head. The whole matter was a mystery too deep for his powers to sound.

"You Scotch are a dauntless race," he said, after a short musing fit. "Here you lie, with a dozen wounds about you, racked with pain, utterly comfortless, with not a creature to do a hand's turn for you but a rough, unready soldier, your wife and child far away and helpless, and yet—and yet—"

He stopped, but a questioning look in those deep, dark eyes, seemed to compel him to continue what was in his mind to say:

"And yet you speak with a look on your face and a ring in your voice through all its feebleness, as though, instead of being a vanquished member of a vanquished cause, you were a triumphant conqueror."

"Even so," came the reply, in tones of startling force and energy, as though that last word had been endowed for him with an especial element of inspiring strength. "Even so, my brother. 'As it is written. For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter; but, In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.' Times of persecution there were in the world, when the Apostle of the Lord said that, and for all ages he has given these words into the mouths of those who fight under the banner of King Jesus, against the world, the flesh, and the devil."

Whether Henry Savile would have attempted any further answer to this speech must remain uncertain for, as it was concluded, the Covenanter, in the forget-fulness of his fervour, turned upon his most badly-wounded side, and brought on a recurrence of the former spasms of acute agony, which for a while rendered him dumb with pain.

By every means in his power Savile sought to assuage his companion's sufferings, far too mercifullyintent upon that occupation to have further thought for discussion. He was young-not yet twenty-and therefore not yet hardened in the cruel circumstances that wait upon war. More than once, it is true, he seen men stricken down dead beside him. But the wild tumult had raged on, and there was no more opportunity than there was desire to dwell upon the dismal events. But now it was widely different. Out on that lonely moor in the dead of night to be watching, those two alone, and one of them dying, partly through a generous effort to screen his friend! Henry Savile felt oppressed with unspeakable sadness. It was of his distinct choice that he had remained with McCall, to whom he had become greatly attached, during the past few weeks of camp companionship. The better nature that was somewhere hidden in the young officer had been attracted by the sterling worth and strict integrity of the single-minded Covenanter, and in spite of wide

diversity of disposition and of pursuits they had bid fair to become fast friends, so far as the circumstances of their relative positions rendered possible.

It would have seemed to mortal minds that, if but to permit a thing of such inestimable value to this soldier, God might have preserved the life of McCall at the present juncture. But His ways are not as our ways, and He works in manners that men do not fathom, until the grand end lies open to their view.

Morgan's attack upon Middleton's forces had been so sudden and unprepared for that the rout had been almost equally sudden, and also so complete that the retreat had immediately become a simple case of Sauve qui peut. It soon became evident to the little company who were hurrying to find shelter from possible pursuit, in the direction indicated by Graham McCall, that their guide could not himself accompany them to the desired goal.

"At any rate not until you have had some hours' rest," said one, little thinking how serious were the injuries he had sustained.

Even the laird himself was not as yet fully conscious of their vital nature, and when Savile insisted on allowing the others to continue their way without him, that he might remain with the exhausted laggard, McCall said cheerfully:

"You are truly a friend in need, my brother. But never mind, you shall soon catch them up. You shall not have to linger long on my account."

Neither did he. But it was not till some minutes

after the pair had come to this halt, in their rapid march, that either of them learnt what was to be the probable event that should set the watcher free.

"If only my poor follower, William Blair, had not lost me in the mêlée," said the laird, in an interval of those final spasms of pain, "there would have been no need, even on the score of your kind humanity, for you to stay by me, and be thus distressed by your sympathy with my sufferings. I am so grieved for you, my brother."

The young officer was kneeling by his side, supporting his head as he so spoke, and now, bending his face low over him, he said huskily:

"If you are grieved for me, I am thankful for myself. I should have jealously grudged you during these last few hours that I still have you, to William Blair. I would give up the tendance of you, for your own sake, to your wife, were she here, or to my old foster-mother, Elspeth Spence, for she is clever though she is crabbed. But I would not resign my charge to any other man alive."

A grateful smile lighted up the death-pale countenance. Another moment, and it grew brilliant as the moonlight that had just succeeded in chasing away the mist, and flooded all the landscape. Some force returned to his hand, and clasping his friend's with it he exclaimed eagerly, joyfully:

"You spoke awhile since of my appearing to be a triumphant conqueror, and I told you that such in truth I am. But even now it is borne in upon me that in yet other ways, while I lie here, vanquished by the arm of flesh, the Lord whom I serve hath given me the victory. I die for the cause of the Covenant, and those ends for which the Covenant was framed I trust in the Lord shall yet be established in the land. But there is another thing lying close at my heart at this moment, my brother."

Savile bent his ear close to the failing voice, and it went on: "For my sake, and for the memory of these solemn hours, you will be friend all Covenanters when so ever it lieth in thy power. I ask no promise; I know it. And yet, finally, my Father will give me this glorious victory—the victory over the spirit of evil in thine heart. You have seen how a Christian dies who hath entered into a sure covenant with his God When you lie waking on your bed, or on the battle-field, this fair night shall come back to your memory, and the Lord shall grant you to me for a radiant star in my crown of life.

"You shall be content then, and I, with Graham McCall's victory."





CHAPTER II.

THE TWO COVENANTS.

the close of the fruitless Glencairn Expedition, and the triumphant accession of Charles II. to the throne of his fathers, a

period of seven years passed away, during which either Scotland or the Covenant could scarcely be said to have any history at all.

It was the Protector's policy to repress anything especially national, that he might the more easily govern the two countries as one people; and as the Covenanters were themselves split up into two strongly antagonistic parties—one for the exiled Charles, one greatly against him—they unconsciously helped to further Cromwell's management of them and of their countrymen.

Seeing, then, that we must anyhow wait a while to get up to the real starting-point of our tale, in the year 1660, when Scotland is in a state of almost uproarious rejoicing over the recovered King, and when Graham McCall's son, Ivie, is just ten years old, I will fill up the interval rapidly by copying

out for your benefit the innumerable dates when the two Covenants were formally signed.

The first of them is called "The National Covenant, or Confession of Faith." This was entered into with a special view to confirming the country in the Reformed Religion. The second is called "The Solemn League and Covenant," and this one was drawn up, as its own framers explain, "for bringing the kingdoms to a more near conjunction and union, and as the most powerful means, by the blessing of God, for settling and preserving the true Protestant religion with perfect peace in His Majesty's dominions, and propagating the same to other nations, and for establishing His Majesty's throne to all ages and generations."

And now for a heap of dates—you can skip them, of course, if you like; perhaps you had better. But just letting your eyes rest for a moment on them, while you turn the page, will give you a better idea of the persistency, the determination, the untiring devotion, the faithfulness of the Covenanters to their Covenants, than any amount of talk or tales could do. And yet more, I must add that without this groundwork idea, put firmly into your heads by the simple means of this picture of dates, I do not think I should do half justice either to you or to myself.

I copy for you from a venerable old Scotch volume, the contents of which I believe I know better now than do half the Scotch folks themselves. It contains both the Covenants, and a multitude of declarations,

orders, and all the rest of it, pertaining thereto. Both the Catechisms with the Scripture proofs, "The Confession of Faith," "The Form of Presbyterial Church Government," and much more. The following are the dates of the National Covenant:

"Subscribed at first by the King's Majesty, and his Household, in the year 1580; thereafter by persons of all ranks in the year 1581, by ordinance of the Lords of Secret Council, and acts of the General Assembly; subscribed again by all sorts of persons in the year 1590, by a new ordinance of Council, at the desire of the General Assembly; with a general bond for the maintaining of the true Christian religion, and the King's person; and, together with a resolution and promise, for the causes after expressed, to maintain the true religion, and the King's Majesty, according to the foresaid Confession and Acts of Parliament, subscribed by Barons, Nobles, Gentlemen, Burgesses, Ministers, and Commons, in the year 1638: approven by the General Assembly 1638 and 1639; and subscribed again by persons of all ranks and qualities, in the year 1639, by an ordinance of Council, upon the supplication of the General Assembly, and act of the General Assembly, ratified by an Act of Parliament 1640; and subscribed by King Charles II. at Spey, June 23, 1650, and Scoon, January 1, 1651."

So much for the first Covenant, the renewal of which was sometimes attended with great excitement and marvellous enthusiasm. In 1638 and '39 people of every rank and age crowded to its signing, till it might well seem as though there were none bearing

the name of Scot whose personal name was not inscribed on the Covenant Roll.

Those days were well likened to the days when the Jews "gathered themselves together as one man: . . . and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded to Israel. . . . And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people . . . And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. . . . And Nehemiah, and Ezra the priest, and the Levites . . . said unto all the people. . . . This day is holy unto the Lord your God: Mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept when they heard the words of the law. Then he said unto them, Go your way, . . . for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the Lord is your strength. . . . And all the people went their way: and there was very great gladness." *

The 1640 signing has a sorrowful interest for the English, seeing that the Covenant was ratified then by Act of Parliament, as a concession of poor Charles the First, by which he tried thus late in the day to secure his Scotch subjects as aids against those who were rebellious in the South.

The dates of signing of the second Covenant, called "The Solemn League and Covenant," are—1st, August 17th, 1643, when it was approved by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, and by both

^{*} These verses exactly describe the Scotch upon the renewal of their Covenants with God.

Houses of Parliament and Assembly of Divines in England. Ratified by Act of Parliament of Scotland, 1644; and again renewed in Scotland, with an acknowledgment of sins, and engagement to duties, by all ranks, 1648, and by Parliament, 1649; and taken and subscribed by King Charles II. at Spey, June 23rd, 1650; and at Scoon, January 1st, 1651, when he subscribed the other.

After all these signings came more "Declarations," "Resolutions," "Remonstrances," and then the famous Sanquhar Declaration, 1680, drawn up by Cameron, one of the sternest and strictest of all the stern old Covenanters. But of this, and of its proclamation, and affixing to the market-cross in the town of Sanquhar on the 8th of November, 1684, there will be further notice in the course of the tale.

One word more. Of course, whether you trouble to read through the above dates or no, you will remember that, from the very first date I have given you, to the last one, and beyond it, the years were strewn thick with troubles, tumults, turmoils, struggles, and recriminations, and were bathed, well nigh to Scotland's drowning depth, in blood.

And so, having allowed Ivie a short space of time in which to grow old enough to learn to read and write, and have a reasonable opinion of his own, let us lay down the old Scotch book, and continue our tale, just at that especial time when Covenanted Scotland did, at last, rejoice to welcome back to his ancestral throne the Covenanted King for whose

cause Graham McCall had so tranquilly resigned his life.

"Look out for the bonfire to-morrow afternoon, Mother Spence," said a handsome giant of a fellow, the handsomeness of his attire well in keeping with himself, but in as great a contrast as it was possible for anything to be with the gaunt, slatternly old woman with whom he was good-humouredly chatting, and with the squalid, untidy hut which she shared with a numerous family of chickens.

One of the smallest of these fledgings was of an obstreperous disposition, and drawing the attention of its owner towards the interior of her dwelling her companion's eyes followed her:

"By my faith," he exclaimed with a laugh more of amusement than disgust—"By my faith, good Mother Spence, it is ever a mystery to me, greater than that of the philosopher's stone, how you Scotch folks contrive to live in these dreadful hovels of yours."

She rewarded the remark with a grim chuckle. "Try one o' them yoursel', one day, and see, Maister Savile," she said with a peculiar glint at him as she spoke, out between her contracted eyelids. "More by token ye suld do sae, for ye're nane but a Scotsman yoursel', as I tak' it. Ye were born upo' Scots ground, and I that am a Scotswoman nursed ye. Whate'er ye may conseeder yoursel' I aye ca' ye Scotch, so there."

"I know that," was the answer, with a second goodhumoured laugh. "And so, of course, according to you, a man born in a stable is a horse, and a child fed upon cow's milk is a calf. Well, well, you are perfectly welcome to call me and consider me what you choose, but my parents prefer to think me English. For my part both countries had a share of my goodwill, even before I fell in with as noble a fellow as ever lived, who called himself your countryman."

"Aye, aye, I know," replied the old woman with a nod. "Ye wad be meaning him ye telled me of before. Yon true Covenanter, Graham McCall. Varry sair and angered was my brither-in-law, William Blair, that ye should ha' been wi's laird in the deeing hoor, 'stead o' himsel'."

"It may be as well some day for him that I was," was the unconsciously prophetic answer; and then, with a second bidding that his foster-mother should be sure to look out for the ruddy glow of the bonfire, to be lighted in the courtyard of Holyrood Palace, Elspeth Spence's grand foster-son called his dog Wallace away from his favourite study of the chickens within the hut, untethered his horse, mounted and rode thoughtfully back to the city.

Even at that hour, when Covenanters were forgetting the usual gravity and dignity of their outward demeanour in gladness of heart that they had regained a king who was doubly pledged to the Covenant, this cousin of Middleton's looked forward dubiously to their future, and muttered beneath his mustache:

"Humph! poor fools. Have they never heard the housewife's proverb—'Promises and piecrust are made to be broken'?"

Whether with some half-formed idea of beginning the good offices at once, which he felt sure would be needed, he did not clearly understand, himself, but at this point in his meditations he rode back to the old woman, and left the dog in charge with her, as a gift for her brother-in-law.

"It's but a pup, at present," he said; "but I think it is sensible."





CHAPTER III.

WHO BEGAN IT?

HE bright sun of an evening in early summer was playing through the green foliage of the birch trees, and giving added richness of colour to the fir tree trunks, when a pedestrian reached the door of a little

moorland shieling.

Standing there, and looking around, a stranger might almost be forgiven the idea that he had really arrived at last at that often heard of, but never hitherto discovered, region, know as the "back of beyond." But nevertheless, as a fact, the small atom of a dwelling-place was well within a strong man's afternoon walk from the noble and important city of Edinburgh.

William Blair had done the journey between the two places, to and fro, twice a day, and been none the worse for his efforts. The moral entertainment he generally received from the solitary occupant of the moorland home was an affair of far more fatigue to his somewhat stolid temperament.

"But kin is kin, and has its duties," he was wont to mutter on such occasions, as though in excuse to himself for voluntarily coming in the way of such an annoyance.

Family feeling is fairly strong, it is to be hoped, all the world over, but in Scotland it is well known to be especially so, and Blair considered it an absolutely necessary part of his week's avocations, when it was anyway possible, to pay a visit to his wife's cross-grained, sharp-tongued old step-sister. Elspeth Spence on her part looked at the matter so thoroughly from her brother-in-law's point of view, claiming his attentions as her natural right, that she never felt it in the slightest incumbent on her to make them pleasant to him. Her first salutation, on this June evening of 1660, was of the kind he generally received.

Elspeth Spence was between twenty and thirty years older than her step-sister and her brother-in-law, but though she looked aged and withered from the wear and tear of life's toils and her temper, she was still well able to attend to her own small daily-bread concerns, and, above all, she was still gifted with a sharp wit, and with a ready-tongued strong voice.

This said voice was audible to William Blair whilst he was still some yards lower down the brae. The speaker was hidden within her one-roomed hut at present, but, although the dimensions of it were

of the most restricted, she seemed to consider it equally incumbent on her to exert her lungs to the utmost, in addressing the family of hens and chickens that shared her home.

The wandering propensities of one particular little fluff-ball of life led her to the door of the shieling just as her sister's husband approached it, and it required no effort for her capable intellect to transfer the torrent of adjurations intended for the chicken to the man.

"Hech!" she screamed at him with a resounding suddenness that almost startled even his expectant nerves. "Hech! then, ye great flat-footed, ill-faured loon ye. How many chicks wad ye like me to put oot yon, for ye to trample to the death!"

And with a nimbleness which none would have supposed possible from her appearance, she stooped, and snatched up the adventurous fledgling, which had certainly seemed bent on committing suicide, by the way in which it had made its foolish little run right into the path of the oncoming visit

Blair waited silent in the sunshine until the yellow atom had been thrown with scant ceremony against the mother hen's side; and then he coolly stooped his head in at the low door, and took a calm survey of the interior, from the rag-muddle human bed, almost entirely filling up the left half, to the fowls' dingy straw-bed, nearly filling up the other.

His investigations were watched for an instant with a lightning flash of grim amusement shining for that brief space in the keen eyes, and then they were pounced upon with a second scream, beginning with the usual apostrophe:

"Hech! Mon, what for will ye stand speering there, like a blind beetle, then? Can ye no coom ben?"

William Blair drew his head up again, with an emphatic shake in the negative. "No, Elspeth Spence, that verily can I no do. When the snaw is under foot, and the sleet o'er head, then any shelter may be better than nane. But the day—"

He raised his eyes to the summer-blue sky, and then lowered them again to the apartment which he was invited to enter, letting them rest there with an expression in them of undisguised disgust.

"Na, na," he ejaculated; "I gi'e thanks to the powers above, that gied me a wife that knaws hoo to gi'e a mon a decent dwelling to abide in."

Old Elspeth pushed out her long upper lip, with an expression perfectly indescribable for its intense scorn. "Ach!" she remarked bitingly, "Mary is like to her mither, the bit pawky, dainty, pink-cheeked thing my daft father saw fit to bring to fill the empty place o' my ain braw, big mither. The twa o' they puir slips of things wad na mak' ain o' her."

"No," was the reply, "that may be, nor wad all the untidinesses o' their haill lives mak' ain o' the days o' yours, I'll be boun. But that's neither here nor there to my present purpose. Mary thocht maybe ye

wad like to hear tell of the braw doings yestreen in Edinburgh, for the accession of King Charles the Second to his ain lawful throne, and so here I am."

A glimmer of satisfaction appeared on the rugged face of the listener. "Deed then," she exclaimed, "I saw the bonny great licht o' the bonfires frae the hill yonder. An' what mair did they do to honour our Covenanted King, besides the fires?"

Blair assumed the air of importance due to the narrator of great things.

"Weel," he said, "I ha' just a bit paper here, drawn up for me by a frien' wi' more knowledge o' a' the ins and oots than I could get, an you'll just see, by it, that the day was by past an ordinar' occasion to other minds as weel's your ain.

"Sermon ended," writes my frien', "the Lord Commissioner returned to the royal palace, attended by great numbers of nobility, knights, and gentry; and all feasted at one time, and at several tables, in a most splendid and magnificent manner. And that nothing might be wanting to complete the solemnity, the Lord Commissioner's lady, with her daughters, at the same time in another room entertained many ladies of quality with all the rarities and delicacies imaginable, and with such admirable concerts of music as were hardly to be looked for from a nation of late so sore depressed—"

"Aye, truly!" interjected old Elspeth. "Depressed, and tortured, and harassed, hath our puir Scotland

been by her enemies. But the covenanted people o' the Lord ha' triumphed. Go on the noo. What mair did the folks na do to show their joy?"

"Ye've made me lose the place," was the reply, "wi' your interruptions. I've mair than a mind I'll no find it again."

But to that threat Elspeth Spence paid no heed. She knew well enough that her companion was not capable of perpetrating such a piece of cruelty, and the next moment the reader continued:

"Towards the middle of dinner His Majesty's health begun by the Lord Commissioner, a sign given from the terrace, the cannon of the castle began to thunder, which was answered from the citadel at Leith by the like roaring; and the great pyramid of coals and tar-barrels which was in the out-court of the palace was likewise given fire to, which for its greatness was extraordinary; and if it had been on the top of a hill in the night time, for two miles about it would have shown light to sing psalms by, in the smallest print; and to have put intil a sweat any that had been frozen with the greatest fit of a cold, and at the same distance too.

"After dinner the young lords and ladies came out and danced all manner of country dances and reels; and none busier than the young Lord Clermont, son of the Lord Commissioner, who was so ravished with joy that if he had not been restrained he had thrown rings, chains, jewels, and all that was precious about him, into the fire." "May blessings light upon his bonny heart for his free-handedness," ejaculated Elspeth, and by way of response her companion demanded:

"Aye then, an' if ye cry blessings upon the young lord's head for only what he had a mind to do, what good things will ye be praying for your ain auld cronie, Jenny Geddes, when I tell ye that she not only thought upon far mair than the Lord Clermont, but did it too, and wad na be letted from the deed by ony ane?"

A quick look of jealous annoyance replaced the former one of willing admiration. It was quite true that Elspeth Spence and Jenny Geddes had known each other ever since they were babies in neighbouring huts, sixty years ago, but their friendship was of that peculiar kind that rather rejoiced in each other's ill-doings and mishaps than took pleasure in their circumstances of a contrary nature. Elspeth betrayed her feelings in the matter on the present occasion by words as well as looks.

"Ha! that Geddes. She hath aye been a thorn in the flesh to me. What new-fangled way hath she thought upon now to bring hersel' to the knowledge o' her neighbours?"

A spice of malice was in the answer:

"Why she helped raise and light the great bonfire, whose ruddy glow ye fand sae bonny as ye looked doon upon it from yon hill, ye said."

He paused a moment, and glanced up mischievously as he lay at his ease upon the heather.

"Are ye hearkening?"

"Aye, I'm hearkening," was the glum reply. "I'm fearing it was nane herself the witch would be adding to the pile."

"Nay, nay," said William Blair in a sharper tone.

"It was nane hersel'. And don't let your spite fling about siccan a dangerous word as that again, or I'll come anigh ye never more. I mean it."

And well might he, or any man with a spark of humanity in those days, start aside from the first uttered hint of casting the imputation of witchcraft at a woman. Obloquy, the most barbarous persecution, hideous tortures and death by burning, followed in the train of the word "Witch." Happily for the possible escape of one victim, Blair was not one of those birds of the air that lend themselves to the carrying of such dangerous matters. His indignant rebuke administered, he turned back to a safer theme:

"Nay, 'twas nane hersel' that Jenny gied to feed the bonfire, but 'twas next door to that, for she e'en gied that by which she's boun to gain her livelihood. She gathered thegither all her creels, basquets, creepes, furms, and the other ingredients that fitted up her fruit and salad shop, her radishes, turnips, carrots, spinage, cabbage, with all the rest of the pot-merchandise that belongs to the garden. And even her elbow-chair, wherein she used to sit i' the market looking down upon the meaner sort of the neighbours, who regard her the noo as in some sort their queen."

Again the listener broke in with her jealous contempt. "Queen, forsooth! When we were bit lassies I know which o' the twa o' us it was could put her best foot foremost."

William Blair lifted his eyebrows with half-real, half-pretended incredulity. "Hey now," he said with a certain ring of contradiction in his tones—"Hey now, when ye were bit lassies it may ha' been so, but the Geddes took the wind oot o' your sails then, on the 16th of July, 1637, nigh a quarter of a century ago. She was beforehand wi' ye then, to throw the first three-legged stool at the Dean's head in the church of St. Giles, when he began to read the new Service Book the English were fain to foist upon us, in contradiction o' our Covenant. What ha' ye to say anent her public speeritedness on that occasion, pray?"

It appeared for a moment or two as though she would have something to do as well as to say, in answer to the question. A race down the brae, after that adventurous-minded chicken which had succeeded in eluding her vigilance, while she was listening to the account of the gay doings in the Northern Metropolis, prevented as quick an ebullition as might have been. But now the unruly truant was a second time secured, and having been tossed unto the straw heap with small regard to chicken sensibilities, its owner was at liberty to turn her attentions back to her visitor. They threatened, as has been said, to be more lively than agreeable.

Darting round upon Blair with an old saucepan-lid clutched up in her hand, she exclaimed with the look and voice of a perfect Fury:

"What ha' I to say, ye speir! Why I ha' to say that if Jenny Geddes tells that o' herself, she tells lees, and I ha' this mair to say, that he who repeats it repeats lees, the blackest lees that were ever invented by the black father o' them and their tellers. And my fingers wad think sma' things to scrat their een oot o' their fause heids."

That last statement seemed so true that Blair instinctively rose from his somewhat helpless position, and strode a yard or so farther off, as he replied:

"Hech! hech, never fash yoursel' to say ony mair about the matter. When it comes to the question of a rampage, I can well believe 'at ye were the foremost in't."

Still more irritated by the jeering words Elspeth did really fling the old lid at him, with the exclamation that his foul tongue deserved to be reived out.

"Coom awa with you, then," was the sharp retort, "or I'll mak'ye compeared before the Kirk Session, like as Jenat McKinlay." This unexpected allusion to another neighbour produced another change in the moral atmosphere.

"Like as wha?" asked the old woman, craning her neck forward eagerly, curiosity and the love of gossip suddenly taking the place of the former fit of clamorous anger. "Tell then, like as wha, would ye say?"

William Blair laughed. "Ah, ha! Maister Ivie may well say that curiosity in the by-past times was likened unto a female. As for Jenat McKinlay, she has been convicted of Sabbath-breaking, this just gone week in October, by flyting with her sister upon the Sabbath-day, and offering to strike her."

Elspeth Spence flung up her withered brown hands with a perfectly honest sentiment of indignation at another's wrong-doings. "Hech! the termagant," she exclaimed. "And upon the Sabbath too! Say though, did she na get her deserts for siccan a piece o' sinfulness?"

Blair shrugged his shoulders. "Didna I tell you that she was compeared before the Kirk Session? And do ye suppose the Session let her aff wi' a word! Nay, nay, mother, we're not fallen upon times when it would be easy to find e'er a Court throughout the land the Judges whereof count mercy for a better thing than sacrifice. Justice to the uttermost farthing, that is the doctrine we are taught to-day."

"And why for no?" demanded Elspeth, as she beat her hands together impatiently, and betrayed, by the rekindling of the flash in her eyes, that she was all prepared for another stormy outbreak.

But her brother-in-law was not of the same mind. He was in no mood for the violent exertion of quarrelling, and a craftily-breathed sigh of "Poor old Jenat!" once more turned the current of his com-

panion's thoughts into a smoother channel. She hastily dropped her arms again, with almost a pleading air of apology, as she echoed the name:

"Jenat! Ah yes, to be sure, it is Jenat we are speaking on. And what was it they did to her then? Did they put her into the Jugs* on the steps of the Market-cross?"

She edged her stool nearer when a nod of the head came in the affirmative. News about one's neighbours is always the best of news to some folks, you know. William Blair gave another short laugh to see how well his ruse had succeeded.

"Aye, aye, that is just what they did do. Set her in the Jugs, with her ditty written and bound upon her forehead, for all the people coming into market to learn what her offence had been, and to take warning. A rare lot of pelting she began to get, I can tell you. For she's nane a favourite, foreby her readiness with fingers and foul speech, and her sister Margaret is fair within and without as the pearl that Master Ivie saith her name signifies."

Old Elspeth drew down her upper lip to even more than its wonted length, showing scorn by the act as plainly as a young girl does when she let her pretty mouth curl upwards.

"Methinks, verily, man, ye're fou anent yon bit slip of a boy, Maister Ivie, and a' the heathenish learning

^{*&}quot;The Jugs," an iron ring attached to the Market-cross, and fastened with a padlock to those convicted of stealing, Sabbath-breaking, drunkenness, and other offences.

he's cram his pow with. I'm mair for hearing of the McKinlays than about that forward laddie."

Blair's face flushed hotly. For an instant he forgot his indolence, and once again retorted fiercely: "'Forward,' do ye think to call him! Faith, then, there is nane with a more forward modesty, covering a greater worth, throughout the length and breadth of Scotland. No, not even amongst those who count four times his years, or six. But there—'tis fule's wastry o' breath gainsaying ye. You ask how Jenat McKinlay won through at the cross last market-day. Well, it went nigh to go as hardly wi' her as 'twould go wi' every scolding woman, whose fingers know better how to scrat than to spin, if I'd my way with them, I'll be bound. But it seems that her sister is of another mind. Scarce had the crowd gathered around, and begun to jeer at her and pelt her, than-"

"Aye, 'than,'" repeated the listener, her very eagerness to hear the whole tale leading her to delay its telling by the interruption; but with very slight heed to it William took up his words again, and went on:

"Scarce had this begun than licht, fleet steps were heard flying along the street; and before one mouth could say to another, 'Yon comes Margaret!' she was through the crowd, up the steps, and standing before her sister, tall and slim, wi' her white arms folded across her plaid, and looking like a silver birch-tree that Queens it so fairly in the woods.

"'Who wounds my sister wounds me!' she said, in a voice that thrilled through you like the plashing of a mountain torrent after the hot march of a summer day. And she cast one clear, steadfast glance upon the throng, that caused clamouring mouths to close, and hands to sink down. Then she just dropped her eyelids over her bonny eyes, and began to knit as quietly as though she were her lane."

The final sentence was spoken in a low, quiet tone that had its influence upon Elspeth, and her thoughts found their natural utterance in the words of Scripture:

"'And yet I am not alone, for the Father is with Me. I have declared unto them Thy Name, and will declare it; that the love wherewith Thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.'"

Fierce-tempered, angry scold as the old woman was, the teaching of the Covenant yet had its hold upon her, and she could reverence those who acted up to the teaching of that Bible whose words she knew so well, but whose spirit she had as yet but faintly grasped.





CHAPTER IV.

IVIE McCALL.



BOY of ten years of age, or thereabouts, with a broad forehead, earnest eyes, and a firm mouth, sat at a table writing with the slow carefulness of a willing but some-

what untrained scholar.

Education for even the higher middle classes was a luxury difficult of attainment in the remoter districts of Scotland, in the troubled days of the seventeenth century.

Had the boy's father been alive he would, however, have stood in no need of tuition, nor would he had his uncle, Robert Leighton, been at hand. But his parent had been slain whilst his only son was still an infant, his uncle was at a distance, and the widowed mother had scant leisure for turning governess. Still, difficulties notwithstanding, she had managed something in that way, and the boy's growing ambition was fast managing still more. Will is a strong key for the unlocking of many gates, and it scarcely needed a

second glance at the boy's expressive countenance to understand that there were few difficulties that men have surmounted that Ivie McCall would not also be able to overcome, as time and occasion should allow.

Dame McCall let her eyes wander many a time from her spinning-wheel, to where her only child sat so intent upon his self-sought studies. And there was a proud, thankful joy in their expression, until at last a shadow of a frown appeared upon his forehead, and then she called to him across the wide apartment:

"Ivie, my son."

So abstracted was he that the call had to be repeated before he became aware that he was being addressed. Even then the voice was rather dreamy in tone with which he replied, according to the ceremonious fashion of a bygone age:

"Your pardon, Ma'am, did you speak to me?"

"Nought beyond your name, my son," was the gentle answer. "But I would add to that, now that you are ready to hearken to me, the advice that you should put by your books for the day, and take your favourite walk out to Bridge of Allen, or anywhere else you please."

"Then that will be round about the court, and back again," said Ivie promptly; "even if I am bound by your commands to take so much of an interruption to my work as that. But indeed, mother dearest"—and the laughing accent gave way to one of

pleading—"indeed, mother dearest, I do hope you will issue no such orders for, at any rate, a good full hour to come. The morning is not half through yet, and I scarce feel as though I had got fairly settled to my studies, far less tired enough of them to wish to put them by."

Mistress McCall shook her head dubiously.

"Nay, my dear boy, I fear that your resolution may be greater than your strength. It was the sight of a very puckered forehead that made me wish for you to take a rest."

For a few moments the broad, clear forehead was puckered up a second time with an effort of memory. Then it grew smooth again, and laying down his pen he sprang up, and came over to his mother, pushing back the curly auburn hair impatiently as he exclaimed:

"Ah! Ma'am, you remind me. It was not tiredness that made me frown just now, but thinking over what William Blair told me yesterday when he got back from Edinburgh. It is but six months ago that he brought us news of the grand doings there, in honour of our Covenanted King, King Charles the Second, ascending the throne of his fathers, and now, mother, now—"

And young as the lad was his voice shook with agitation. Mrs. McCall gazed at him with surprise not unmingled with alarm.

"And now what, Ivie? Speak on, my son, for you have excited my fears as well as my curiosity.

Hath ought of mischance befallen our Covenanted Sovereign, would you say?"

"Not our Sovereign, mother; but our Covenant, there is sore need to fear, is threatened, if the rumours which William Blair saith are rife in Edinburgh have aught in them of truth."

Political troubles and religious conflicts are of small account to most boys of ten years of age, but it was no wonder that Ivie McCall took a precocious and strong interest in them. His father was one of those staunch Covenanters who, having sworn allegiance to a Covenanted King, refused to cease praying for him during the days of the Protectorate. He had thus already rendered himself an object for suspicious watchfulness and threats, when William Cuningham, Lord Glencairn, made his offer to the exiled Charles, of receiving the Royal commission from him to raise and command an army of restoration in Scotland.

The tempting offer was of course accepted, 1653, and this gave the laird of McCall the full opportunity he desired to prove his loyalty and faithfulness. The long-protracted struggles and sufferings, of more than a century, had so far deepened the tone of feeling in Scotland, that his wife made scarcely any resistance to his wishes. She knew too well that had she been a man she would have followed the same course. As it was she gave him a proud, fond smile for farewell, and then returned within the gates of their home to pray and weep over their infant

child, the little Ivie, her prayers divided between her King in banishment, and her husband fighting for his restoration.

And at length the sad news came that the Laird of McCall was one of the few who had been slain, before Glencairn's ill-managed, fruitless enterprise finally broke down. And the widow and orphan, driven from their hereditary home, deprived of their property, were compelled to accept, with all gratitude, the asylum found for them, in the neighbourhood of Stirling, by their faithful family retainer, William Blair.

Even had Dame McCall been silent on the subject, Ivie would have been thoroughly posted up as to the troubles and wrongs of himself and his country; for Blair had taken this as another matter of conscience, to instil the story into his young laird's mind in every minutest particular, from the first dawning of reasoning faculties in the child's mind.

Even already, at scarcely five years of age, little Ivie understood, in some fashion, what the Scottish Covenant was; and knew the nature of the oath that his father, the King, and nearly the whole of his countrymen, high and low, rich and poor, had sworn to guard with their lives. At ten years of age he felt bound to it, himself, with a strength and tenacity few people in quiet peaceable times would imagine to be possible.

The news that had been imparted to him the past

evening had given him the sleepless night, and the heavy-hearted morning, that most boys would only suffer if they learnt that a favourite pony was to be sold, or that they were forbidden the coveted permission to join a cricket club.

The very work he had chosen for his day's studies bore upon the present subjects of his perturbed meditations. After a few more words to his mother, with regard to Blair's tidings, he went back to the table to fetch the sheets he had been writing so industriously.

"Hearken, I pray you, dearest mother," he said.

"I have been copying out some sentences of our National Covenant, the better to impress them upon mine own remembrance. And it seems to me too terrible to think that any Scotsman can be found who will, of his own freedom, break through the great bond it lays on us."

Mistress McCall uttered a deep, low sigh. She and hers had at any rate paid a heavy price sooner than break through it. She followed the sigh with the bestowal of a grave smile of approval upon the young student.

"Read out your sentences, my son," she said.
"Let me hear where your choice has fallen."

As that was just what he was all eagerness to do, Ivie needed no second bidding, but started off at once, the strong words losing nothing of due emphasis as they were uttered by his ringing, rich-toned voice.

"I began here, mother, some way in:

"'We Noblemen, Barons, Gentlemen, Burgesses, Ministers, and Commons, under-subscribing, considering divers times before, and especially at this time, the danger of the true reformed religion, of the King's honour, and of the publick peace of the kingdom, by the manifold innovations and evils, generally contained, and particularly mentioned in our late supplications, complaints, and protestations; do hereby profess, and before God, His angels, and the world, solemnly declare, That with our whole heart we agree, and resolve all the days of our life constantly to adhere unto and to defend the foresaid true religion, and to labour, by all means lawful, to recover the purity and liberty of the Gospel, as it was established and professed before the aforesaid novations.

* * * * * * * *

"'And therefore, from the knowledge and conscience of our duty to God, to our King and country, without any worldly respect or inducement, so far as human infirmity will suffer, wishing a further measure of the Grace of God for this effect; we promise and swear, by the GREAT NAME OF THE LORD OUR GOD, to continue in the profession and obedience of the foresaid religion; and that we shall defend the same, and resist all these contrary errors and corruptions, according to our vocation, and to the uttermost of that power that God hath put in our hands, all the days of our life."

Ivie paused and looked up at his companion, feeling greatly gratified at the glow on her cheeks, and the light in her eyes. He put all down to the account of sympathy with what was read, and

was more gratified than if he had guessed how much of the mother's interest was centred in the reader. However, the share given to both led her to say rather quickly:

"Have you written out any more, Ivie dear? Your first extract has been well chosen, to my thinking."

Ivie's face brightened gladly at the praise, but the next moment it grew grave again. "I chose it partly because it contains that great, strong, solemn oath, which looks even the more solemn, you remember, mother, from being written in great capitals:

"'We promise and swear by the GREAT NAME OF THE LORD OUR GOD.'"

Again a silence, till little McCall broke it with a low-breathed—"Oh! mother, how can any one dare to go back from that!"

The only answer he received this time was a bend of the head. That vow was verily a solemn one, —one to bind men even to the death, and he who had just read it out with such fervour was the only son of his mother—a widow. And Blair had brought word that there were troubled rumours in the air.

At that minute Mistress McCall's own allegiance to the Covenant was wavering, and from the very circumstance of her boy being so enthusiastic for its upholding. But of course nothing of this even remotely suggested itself to Ivie's mind, and turning to a second of his carefully-written sheets he said:

"Here is another paragraph I have copied down."

It immediately follows the last. That was specially about our religion. This is about honouring the King."

But as he was about to go on with his reading the door of the spence* opened, and the faithful family retainer and friend, William Blair, appeared, looking very different as to expression and deportment to when we saw him, some months ago, lying on the heathery brae-side outside the door of his sister-in-law's hovel.

* "Spence," the private family sitting-room, in contradistinction to that in which the family and servants all assembled together.





CHAPTER V.

A REMINDER FOR CHARLES II.

AD it not been for the devotion of William

Blair to his dead master's widow and child, and for the generosity shown to them, at first by Blair's father, and of late by himself, it is doubtful whether either of them would have survived the miseries following the laird's death. But had any stranger witnessed the relations between the two parties he must have supposed the favours to have been bestowed on the other side. Not all Mistress McCall's open expressions of gratitude for a home, maintenance, and most watchful service, could prevail upon William Blair to diminish one jot of the almost exaggerated deference he saw fit to pay to her, and to the disinherited young laird.

"Use is second nature," as the saying has it, and certainly of late the lady had grown so accustomed to the man's reverential ways that she had both ceased to argue against them, and to remember very clearly that she had no claim to be treated with such great observance. But the readings from the National

Covenant had brought back many old memories, and as her eyes rested upon Blair standing humbly just within the doorway, waiting permission to speak or to come forward, she felt a sudden compunction for her own forgetfulness, and at the same time something almost of anger against the worthy fellow himself for having so acted as to aid her fault. There was an unusually sharp accent in her voice as she addressed him:

"William Blair, almost you make me think it must be my duty that I should take my child's hand, and wander forth whither the Lord might lead, when I see thee stand thus, within a dwelling that should of right be thine own home."

Even whilst she was speaking he came forward up the room, and rejoined with more vehemence than his phlegmatic temperament often displayed:

"Hech! then, seek not to turn one man from showing respect to those who suffer for the cause of the Covenant. Rather spend all energies in teaching the wavering thousands of our nation to recognize the path of duty boldly, and to follow it fearlessly. These are nane the days, forsooth, in which to cease from paying honour to the memory of those who suffered for our country's truth."

"For our country's truth?" murmured Ivie, rather taken with the full-sounding expression, but at the same time not quite able to grasp its meaning.

Blair turned round upon him. "Aye, Master Ivie, for our country's truth. Did not our Scotland's sons,

from the highest to the lowest, from the nobleman great at Court, aye, truly, from the King himself down to the shepherd-lad upon the hills, did we not all swear to keep and to defend our Covenant with our lives! And what all her children vow to maintain, do they not pledge their country to?"

A quick nod of the head signified growing comprehension of the matter, but, before anything more could be said between the two, Mistress McCall broke in with anxious questionings on her side, as to the foundation for what her boy had told her an hour since.

"Think you truly, William Blair, that there are signs threatening our national kirk?"

The man's powerful chest heaved visibly beneath his plaid before he answered, with a vehemence the more impressive from his usual slow-tongued speech: "Aye, verily are there! Signs from within and from without. Awhile since a party of the Remonstrants, with our zealous James Guthrie himself for one of the number, drew up a supplication to His Majesty, King Charles the Second, to remember his God and our holy Covenant, lest worldly and wicked counsellors should lead his feet aside, and draw his heart from the right way. They addressed him fairly, as our Covenanted Monarch. They besought him that he would not take offence that they made themselves the Lord's remembrancers to him, that more than once, by solemn oath under hand and seal in presence of Almighty God, the Searcher of hearts, he had

allowed and approved of the National Covenant, and of the Solemn League and Covenant, faithfully obliging himself to prosecute the ends thereof in his station and calling. This is what they wrote, lady; and, whether somewhat that they added might be of stronger words, still, nought was there in the paper that, the world could not but see, was written by these men without prayer, and a longing from their souls to work for righteousness' sake."

He broke off with a gasp, and, carried away by his rapid, passionate torrent of speech, it was also with a gasp that Mistress McCall ejaculated her eager query:

"Well?"

He snatched up the word, as though almost glad in his present mood to be offered something fresh that he might at least assume to be angered at.

"'Well!' he exclaimed, and repeated the word yet again with sharp, short emphasis, as though he spat it from his mouth. "'Well!' na, na, lady! There is no 'well' in this case."

"Nay, good Blair, I but put it as a question," began the lady in remonstrance. But for once Blair had no room in his mind for considerations of deference. He went on as though without even hearing the interruption.

"Verily there is na room for ony 'well' in this business, for I find nocht in it but ill, forby the grand supplication itsel'. What think ye, lady, they will have done with it, and wi' those wha framed it

for the King? Say then, what think ye they ha' dune wi' t'ane and tither?"

It was easy enough to see, by the questioner's lowering brow and indignant gestures, that no favourable reception had been accorded to either, but Kate McCall, in her innocent-mindedness, and the ignorance of her remote seclusion from the world, could form no guess that she felt to be reasonable as to the treatment they might have received. And after a few moments of impatient waiting William Blair went on with his account of the news he had brought back from his visit to Edinburgh.

"Hech!" he muttered as though to himself, "wha would believe as I could be siccan a fule as to suppose that those to whom belongeth, as the Lord hath said, the kingdom of heaven, would compass the thought o' what evil can be done by the children o' the world and Satan. Nay, my lady," and he spoke aloud again; "nay, I maun e'en tell you, I doubt, for neither ye, nor Maister Ivie there, wad ever mak' oot to imagine."

Ivie came nearer, his face lifted solemnly to the servant's face. "Oh! William, you did not tell me anything about all this. The King has not had the minister and his friends put to death, has he?"

Equally solemnly Blair laid his hand on the boy's shoulder. "No, Master Ivie. Whether the King has been allooed a hand i' the affair at all I canna say, and those wha ha' managed it ha' no killed the saints—as yet. But they ha' cast the hail o' those wha ha'

drawn oop the sooplication, intil the jail i' the Castle o' Edinbro, wi' the exception o' James Guthrie, wha has escaped, the Lord be praised! And the written and signed paper itsel' mony a ane, besides me, is fain to judge has gane to the gay, sinfu' Court in the English Babylon to mak' fule's food for jesting upon."

And, with that last possibly-probable item of news, the Covenanter's feelings appeared to grow altogether too strong for his control, and with a hurried obeisance he turned and quitted the apartment.

Mistress McCall looked after him with something of disappointment mingling with the sorrow in her face.

"Ivie, my son, this is a sad and grievous tale that our friend has brought us. But I would that he had delayed to leave us until I had learnt something more from him, anent the London mission of our learned and skilful minister, Mr. James Sharp. What can the treachery be that you say he hinted at, as concerning that undertaking, and who can it be that is suspected of being the traitor?"

Later on in the day she learnt the answer to these questionings.





CHAPTER VI.

A TRAITOR IN THE HEART OF THE CAMP.

Sidered the affairs he had come to speak of were of such moment as to over-ride the commoner distinctions between fellow-

creatures, or possibly the friendly rebuke administered in the morning had some weight. But, however that might be, when he entered the spence in the evening he did not pause for a welcome as he had done at an earlier hour, but advanced to the upper end of the room with a certain grave dignity, which in its turn was even more unlike the appearance he presented to old Elspeth than was that of the subservient manner of the morning.

Even little McCall was struck with something unaccustomed in the bearing of his father's faithful soldier-servant, and, checking the eager exclamation about to burst from his lips, he dropped quietly down on to the three-legged stool at his mother's feet, the same humble seat which he was in the habit of

carrying for his mother's use when they attended the conventicles, and prepared himself to listen with that rapt attention which had already given him such an unusual insight into the events and sentiments of his day.

The lady raised her eyes to the man's face with a gentle smile of greeting. "Ah! Blair, I was confident that you would not leave my just and natural desire to know all you have to tell unsatisfied. But I fear me there is to be more grief gleaned in the hearing than contentment?"

"That may too surely be affirmed," was the reply.

"Unless you would account yourself of the number of our enemies, who doubtless must well-nigh crack their throats now with shouting for base joy over the foul treason in our camp."

Mistress McCall uttered a hasty ejaculation, laying her hand on her boy's head. "Ah! Blair, I trusted that Ivie had mistaken you, when he brought me that black word as from your mouth; but you repeat it then? Can it be advisedly?"

"Would to God that it were not so!" answered Blair. "But I have news direct from London that hath borne it in upon me, beyond the reach of all questioning, that there is now, even in these very hours, ripening the very blackest treason to the cause in the midmost heart of the camp—"

" And the name of the traitor is-"

"James Sharp."

A silence, long, deep, and intense, followed the

utterance of that name. It was broken at last by Mistress McCall.

"Are there two James Sharps?"

The query was put in an awed whisper. The reply was in a tone so low-breathed from its sternness that it was almost a whisper too.

"There may be two, there may be two thousand. But may the Almighty stretch His mercy to the uttermost for their forgiveness, if they be but onetenth part so deep-dyed in sinfulness as he, you wot of, and I mean!"

Again a long pause, and again the lady broke it, hoping against hope, in her bewilderment of surprise and apprehension, that there must be some mistake somewhere, either in her ears or in her understanding.

"But, Blair," she began, with an accent that almost appeared to be pleading with him to say that he had been frightening her with shadows as unreal as a child's bogey. "But, Blair, you forget-do you not forget—the clever minister, and noted Covenanter, Mr. James Sharp, hath been chosen as our representative, as a pleader in especial for the maintenance of the rights and simple purity of our Scottish Kirk. He hath been deputed our messenger-in-chief to the Court and Parliament in London, because he hath already many times of old approved himself full of needful zealousness."

Blair's head had sunk down towards his chest in an attitude of profound dejection. He scarcely raised

it now as he said slowly, and in the same stern tone as before:

"Did I not say that it was deep within the camp's heart that the treason lurked and cherished itself, feeding itself fat and strong with the blood of the victim it is about to overthrow?"

Ivie McCall had been sitting for the past few minutes with his curly head clasped between his hands, an attitude that was unconscious mimicry of his good uncle, the truly Christian minister, Robert Leighton, whose teaching his mother so much desired for her boy. He still maintained the same position when William Blair came to an end of his passionate outburst, but nevertheless his voice was quite distinct as he said quietly:

"'About to overthrow!' Will, then, the power of evil be greater than the power of good? If it is well for the world to see that a nation can keep sacred a sacred vow, will God refuse His aid that it shall be done?"

The simple question struck home, the keener perhaps, that it was but a repetition of sentences and assertions put in every variety of form, and on all possible occasions, by Blair himself.

The teaching had fallen upon teachable ears, and now, when Blair had almost felt as if his own faith in his own teaching were dying, it was given back to him. A deeper tinge dyed his weather-bronzed cheeks, and the firm mouth quivered for a moment, ere he returned an answer as one justly rebuked.

"Your pardon, Maister Ivie; and most truly do I crave it baith of ye, and of the Shepherd o' the sheep Himsel', for daring to speak sic thoughts as may turn His lambs oot o' the right path. Nay, nay, never believe me, nor ony ither mon as shall seek to lead ye to think sma' things o' the Almighty power o' the Creator. We are a' in His hands, our country, our Covenant and a', and, as David said, so will we say to our Father:

"'Thou, O God, hast been a shelter for us, and a strong tower from the enemy. . . . For Thou, O God, hast heard our vows: Thou hast given us the heritage of those that fear Thy name. . . . Truly our soul waiteth upon God; from Him cometh our salvation. He only is our Rock and our Salvation; He is our defence, we shall not be greatly moved. . . . In God is our salvation and our glory: the rock of our strength, and our refuge, is in God."

He waited a moment, and then, evidently restored in a degree to his wonted calm by the repetition of the verses from these most comforting Psalms, he said more tranquilly:

"Nay, nay, Maister Ivie, ye have the root o' the matter in ye, and no mistake. The Lord is aye on the side o' justice an' honour. And so, all faithless misdoubtings aside, we're boun' to win in the long run, and to win safe to covert. But meantime I, for my pairt, daurna hope that there will be nane called, like Stephen of old, to seal their testimony wi' their bluid. When James comes back, turned from shepherd into

wolf, there will be a sair worrying begin amang the flocks, an' those who strive to minister to their needs according as the vows bind them."

This digression ended, Mistress Kate McCall harked back to the former subject of James Sharp, who had been sent up to London but a short time since as the Presbyterians' Ambassador, as their very especial representative, as the lady had truly said, with this for his chief instruction:

"You are to use your utmost endeavours that the Kirk of Scotland may, without interruption or encroachment, enjoy the freedom and privileges ratified by the laws of the land."

"And how think ye, my lady," asked William Blair, as the conversation progressed; "how think ye the sworn, perjured Covenanter, James Sharp, is obeying those instructions?"

The lady shook her head sadly. She was beginning to grow convinced that her companion had reason for his wrath against the clever, crafty minister, who, as a fact, was using his brethren's fulness of trust in him as stepping-stones for his own unscrupulous ambition.

"Tell me, my good Blair, all that you have learnt, and fully if you will," she said wearily. "For what you have already said hath made me heart-tired, and I care not for guessing at sad riddles. Perchance he who hath told thee these bad tidings is himself misinformed?"

Blair's face lighted for a moment with a smile, not of mirth, but keen significance. He glanced quickly

round the room, at the windows, stepped to the door, and pushed against it noiselessly to make sure that it was fast. Then he came back nearer to his companions than before, and bending his head murmured below his breath:

"My lady, I have my tidings, such as they are, from the lips of John Knox's own descendant; from the mouth of the staunch and noble minister, John Welch."

His hearer started. She had certainly little enough expected to hear that her servant's informant was one of the chief of the religious leaders in the country. Her doubts as to the truth of the news must now be finally laid at rest, but a new wonder had taken their place. Blair was quite prepared for that, and answered it.

"Yes," he said in the same cautious tone as before; "yes, I am known to Mr. John Welch, and have frequent interviews with him in various places. But it is not expedient either for him, for me, nor for you, that this should be discovered. He is too resolute and fearless an adherent to the Covenant to be in favour in high places. They are growing very bitter against him lately, for the attempt hath been made to bribe him from his conscience, by the offer of the Archbishopric of St. Andrews, and the base attempt hath failed with him, as with Robert Douglas also, to be tried wi' mair success upon another."

"Upon James Sharp," sighed Mistress McCall.

A bend of the head answered her, as he continued:

"Mr. Welch was but just back when I went to Edinburgh last week, from the toilsome journey he hath lately taken to London, whither he had gone to see how the land lay. And with his own eyes he hath witnessed James Sharp feasting wi' the proud ecclesiastics o' the English Kirk, fawning upon the greatest o' the land, who are the known enemies o' our ain, and laughing, aye, laughing wi' the loudest, at jokes made upo' those men and those things that, as a Covenanted Minister o' the Kirk o' Scotland, he should hold most sacred. Mair than that—"

And the speaker broke off for a few moments whilst he felt within the folds of his plaid for something he had placed there for safe keeping. It was not far to seek. A small piece of folded paper, and as he opened it he went on:

"Mair than that, he adds the cooward sin o' hypocrisy to his other crimes. He writes to his freend, good Robert Douglas, as though he were engaged, up there in the great city, fighting heart and soul for the true cause, stemming a raging torrent as for life or death. And all the while he is drifting, drifting, an' glad to drift, the way the pleasantest stream o' worldly delights may carry him. But I, and mair than I, ha' oor eyes upon him, and the day may yet come when he will wish his eyes had been blinded before they saw to write such words as these."

So immersed in his thoughts had the man become, that during the past few moments he had forgotten the presence in the apartment of any but himself, and Ivie saw, with some feelings of very pardonable vexation at foiled inquisitiveness, that the small interesting-looking piece of paper just produced from the plaid's folds was being mechanically doubled up again, preparatory to being returned to its former resting-place.

"Blair, please-" he began timidly, and there stopped. But his voice had already recalled his friend to his surroundings, and the rugged face unbent again as it turned to the boy who possessed so large a share of the man's strong affections.

"What would ye then wi' Blair, Maister Ivie?" he asked, stooping low to lay his hand on the boy's shoulder. "Would ye that I should cease my claverings the noo, for awhile, and gang for a stretch across the moors wi' ye, afore the sun gies them up to the mists for another night? Coom awa' then."

And suiting the action to the word he drew the little fellow up on to his feet. But Ivie resisted with a half-laugh.

"No, no, William, I do not wish to come away out with you yet. But-"

"Aye, 'But'-Is it 'but' ye do wish me to gi'e my lang tongue a bit rest, and let yours wag awhile?"

Ivie laughed outright now. "Oh, William, you are not guessing cleverly to-day at all. It's-it's-I thought maybe there was somewhat in that paper ye meant to read to us?"

"Pa-per. To-read-" began Blair musingly, till Ivie put up his hand and touched the small folded sheet, and then recollection returned in full force, and with it the stern, indignant looks once more.

"Ah! true," he ejaculated. "Aye, Maister Ivie, I have here indeed somewhat that I would read to ye and to your mother, that in time to come ye may remember the double-facedness of Scotland's fine Archbishop! I have lines here, copied by Mr. Welch from letters of James Sharp's to Mr. Robert Douglas. They are but few, but they are enough."

"Enough for what?" asked little McCall.

Blair clenched his hand over the paper, as he answered in those stern unaccustomed tones that he had been speaking in, the past hour:

"Enough to show what manner of man he is whose lying heart dictated them. Enough, as I have said, to bear evidence in the future."

So saying he smoothed out the crumpled sheet again, and with a sign of request for permission, addressed to the lady, he proceeded quickly to read the contents—with his own comments interspersed:

"My good friend Douglas, ye write of proposing to join me here, to help forward the good work. But I would advise you no. Were it for your own pleasure I would of course urge that ye should come, but I know that ye are not capable of being tickled by the desire of seeing the grandeur of a Court."

"See you!" muttered the reader, "see you there the crafty touch. A covert hint that if the noble and

simple-minded Robert Douglas did join him, friend James Sharp would choose to believe that the plea of duty did but cover a giddy, womanish love of fine sight-seeing. And further on he tells him that-

"'When matters come to a greater ripeness two or three months hence, your coming may be of more use and satisfaction to yourself, and advantage to the public.'

"That is to say," put in Ivie with flushed cheeks; "that is to say, I suppose, William, that he won't mind his joining him when he has got everything settled as he wants, first?"

"Verily," came the grim reply, "that is even what Mr. Welch hath said. But Mr. Douglas hath too upright a nature to deal with rogues. And besides there are others about him who do so idolize the King as that a man might more safely, it would seem, be guilty of blasphemy than say aught against the glory of the King's perfections. And thus, as Charles Stuart hath sworn, by the taking of the Covenant vows upon him, that we shall have no bishops, so they declare we shall have none, nor do I think they will believe how easily vows may be set aside until they shall actually see that the bishops be settled in their midst!"

The tears rolled heavily down the widow's cheeks. It did indeed seem a bitter thing to her that her husband should have died for his faith to a Covenant King, who, himself, could coolly set aside the

Covenant. But not noticing her emotion William Blair turned back to his paper, saying passionately:

"Here is another of the false-hearted minister's sayings, by which he thinks to fling the mist over us, until he shall have grasped unto him the purple and fine linen of a Dives:

"'I find a high, loose spirit appearing here, and I hear they talk of bringing in Episcopacy into Scotland, which I trust they shall never be able to effect. I am much saddened and wearied out with what I hear and see. The Lord fit us for future trials, and establish us in His way.'"

As Blair for the second time folded and put by his notes, Mistress McCall choked back the flowing tears, and rose, with a gracious bend of the fair head, by way of token that she would now be alone. Sorrowful memories were crowding thickly upon her, and she felt that she must give a short time to the grief which she so rarely allowed herself to indulge.

"What are the future trials that Mr. Sharp fears, William?" asked Ivie, as the two left the house together.

The answer was short and sharp. "Hatred and contempt, Maister Ivie. Pray that you may never merit them."



CHAPTER VII.

"MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL AT STIRLING."

ORROW for her son's fatherlessness and her own widowhood did not alone occupy Mistress McCall's heart, as she sat weeping for some long time after her faithful friend

and retainer had left her.

During the nine years of her residence at Blair's Farm she had enjoyed the ministry of him who styled himself "Minister of the Gospel at Stirling;" that James Guthrie, who, she now learnt through Blair, had fallen under the displeasure of the Crown so heavily as to be in danger of his liberty at least, if life itself were not destined to pay the forfeit of his boldness for the cause of truth and righteousness, as it presented itself to his apprehension.

So greatly had she appreciated his vivid eloquence that none of the heavy northern rains of spring with their accompaniment of bitter blasts, nor the raging snow-storms of winter had prevented her taking the five-mile walk to and fro to the Stirling kirk, on every Sabbath that her favourite minister's restless energy permitted him to occupy his own pulpit.

Certainly it was not all "Gospel" that Kate McCall, and the others of his immense congregations heard from his lips. But it harmonized far more closely with the spirit of the times and the general temperaments of his auditors, that he chose the texts for his discourses from the Old Testament, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and some of the Psalms, rather than from the New. Still less they regretted, in that period of difficult travelling and no newspapers, that the discourses themselves ranged over so vast and various a field of subjects that oftentimes the text got lost sight of altogether.

But whatever else faded out of view some things well worth the having remained ever to the fore—the preacher's own integrity and honesty of purpose; his fervent longing to so teach and exhort his hearers as that they might ever have courage to hold fast the profession of the faith without wavering; and his distinct, absolute trust in God, in His infinite goodness, love, and wisdom. "The causes of God's wrath" were not to be reckoned to the account of a vengeful Creator who delighted in sacrifice, but to man's iniquity, who had been created upright, but had sought out many inventions.

It might have seemed strange to some that a woman so essentially and sweetly womanly as Kate McCall, should have given her preference to a minister bitter in his wrath, fierce in his denuncia-

tions as James Guthrie. But the gentlest women are generally attracted to the strongest-natured men, and besides, the widow had suffered so terribly herself, from the evils of the times, that it was little wonder if even to her ears his wrathful invectives sounded sometimes welcome as grand music.

As she sat there weeping silently in her quiet room, she wondered sadly if she should ever hear him again, if the thunderous rhetoric would ever again reverberate around the bare kirk walls as he carried the rapt hearts of his audience along with him, while he hurled great epithets, hot with a burning indignation, at lukewarm partizans, perjured persecutors, and the base sinners against laws human and divine, who had provoked God's just wrath and indignation against a people who wilfully erred from His appointed ways.

"Shall I ever behold him again with mortal eyes? Ah! dear Lord, beseech Thee grant I may," she murmured, almost breaking off midway in her utterance of the last word as a slight sound beside her struck upon her ears.

She turned towards it, and as she did so a cry rose to her lips and died there. The distaff fell from her hands upon the floor, with a little thud that seemed to her shaken nerves to be a resounding crash loud as a peal of thunder.

She had offered up a prayer but that moment, and there stood its answer with her in the room. She tried to rise, but her limbs failed her.

"Mr. James Guthrie!" she whispered, scarcely letting her breath give the name utterance.

He approached a step nearer. "Even so," he said; "the servant of the Lord, James Guthrie. And in the flesh as yet, Mistress McCall, so ye need not to speir at me you timorous gate, as though ye saw a ghaist. I am my ain sinful sel', the hunted mon, James Guthrie."

"Hunted!" ejaculated the lady, the colour which the sudden shock, and not superstitious fear, had driven away beginning to return to her cheeks. "Hunted, do you say, sir? Is it the sad truth then that William Blair hath but this very evening told me?"

Obeying a mute invitation, the minister dropped wearily down into a seat as he replied: "If William Blair hath told ye that the spirit of evil is abroad, the spirit of falsehood and persecution, he hath told you the sad and awful truth, no doubt. And furthermore, for truth-speaking my brethren have they clapped into their dungeons, and me they seek."

Mistress McCall leant forward with tearful, anxious eyes—"Ah! but you will not let them find you—you will hide?"

A calm, lofty smile rested on the stern-featured, rugged face. "Aye," he said slowly as though he weighed his words. "Aye, for a season I am content to hide even as Elijah retreated from the enemies who thirsted for his blood, and as our Master, His ain sel', hid Himself from those who would put Him to

death, until His appointed work in the world should be accomplished to the end."

Whilst he was still speaking, and resting in the chair with the cool unconcern of an unmarked man living in an age of tranquillity, the door of the apartment opened brusquely, and William Blair appeared. Giving a rapid glance around, a cry of mingled relief and consternation escaped him, to be checked almost before it had found vent.

Stepping within the room, and dashing close the door, he sprang with one bound across to the minister, nearly with the same movement tearing him up from the chair.

"Sir!" he exclaimed beneath his breath, and with the impetuosity of the truest friendship. "Know ye not, sir, that your pursuers are close upon your track? And ye sit here, in the broad free light, as though letters had fresh come from the backsliding King and Parliament praying ye to follow the bent o' your ain will, and to spare nought in minding them o' their duties, an' their late sinfuness! Hide ye, sir, hide quickly, for ye ha' na time to spare."

Mistress McCall wrung her hands, and the only one of the three there who maintained a calm face and tranquil bearing was the man who was in such jeopardy. Looking quietly and critically around at the walls of the room he replied coolly:

"Thanks, friend, for thine eagerness in my behalf, but I judge I have time enough to elude my pursuers on this occasion, at any rate. Dame," he said, turning to the frightened woman, "will ye have the gudeness to tak' down yon big Bible from yonder nuik, or to let me do so, mysel'?"

Kate McCall clasped her hands. "Ah! Mr. Guthrie, another hour, please, sir. The Father will know the sore stress of minutes ye are in. Or—if you will e'en spend some of the precious moments in reading the Word, I have here another Bible; it is smaller, but methinks thy sight is good."

"Aye, nigh good enough to tempt me, you may soon think, to try if I canna see through a stone wall," was the half-laughing answer given by the stern mouth, as the minister put aside the small volume proffered him, and crossed over to where the great one he had pointed at lay bedded in a niche in the wall. His companions followed him with heavy-hearted submission, but as he reached up his hand to draw the book forth he turned half-round to them again, with a face set enough now once more to seriousness, as he said:

"Friends, ye do me na mair than justice when you credit me with placing esteem for the Words of the Lord aboon personal peril. But since there is here no present question of teaching precious truths to perishing souls I will leave the reading for a mair convenient season, and mak' an effort to save my body out o' the hands o' Satan's emissaries."

So saying he pulled out of the niche the large volume of the Scriptures, a couple of Psalm-books,

and a tattered copy of the old disused Scottish Liturgy. Then passing his palm over the wall at the back he pressed a secret spring, and to the astonishment of the others a small door flew inwards, leaving space enough for a person to pass through into a long, narrow chamber lying between the room occupied by Mistress McCall and the outer wall of the house.

James Guthrie lost no further time in scrambling through into this hiding-place, of which William Blair's grandfather had told him in his boyhood. Ten minutes later it was furnished with blankets, a table, chair, lamp, and food, and the secret door had scarcely been shut and the books replaced when the clatter of horses' hoofs in the yard, and the noise of voices, announced the arrival of the party who had been sent out on the search for the bold-spoken and obnoxious minister.

Standing on scant ceremony the strangers pushed their way into the house and penetrated to its mistress's presence.

"Good-day to you, dame," began the officer in command with an air of arrogant familiarity that made Blair clench his hands with indignation.

"Good-day to you," he repeated, as he went striding about the apartment, peering into the cupboards and bureaus.

"Good-day to you," returned the lady, striving to hide her deep agitation under an outward show of gentle dignity. "May I demand to know what right or reason ye have, sir, for thus intruding into my quiet dwelling-place, and for overlooking in such a manner my few poor possessions?"

The rough soldier laughed insolently—"Poor you may well style them, dame. You need be under no apprehension for their safety, I assure you. By my faith, there is not the greediest rascal of my troop would care to be burdened with them at a gift. We seek other goods than these—something better of a prize."

"I fear then you will have come to a wrong—" began Kate McCall, but the officer shortly interrupted her.

"Maybe, maybe. But we will go our own way to work to find out whether we have come to the wrong house or not, before we leave. We are hunting up that pestilent fellow and arch rebel, a certain Reverend James Guthrie, well known in these parts, we are informed, and we have received information leading us to believe that he may have sought concealment here."

As he spoke the officer stood close before Mistress McCall, keenly scanning her countenance the while, and as she felt her eyelids trembling, and her colour wavering beneath the searching gaze, she deemed it safer to acknowledge a portion of the truth than to attempt to be wholly silent. Folding her hands tightly the one within the other she forced herself to look up and face her interrogator, as she replied to the implied question;

"The holy, Godfearing minister of the kirk in Stirling, the Reverend James Guthrie, hath indeed been lately here. Famished and worn with long fasting and long journeying he came here, where he was secure of a welcome. And he hath received both rest and refreshment in this very room. May the all-merciful Father be praised that he had left it before you came, and that I am spared the suffering of seeing him carried off a prisoner before my eyes. May the Lord have him in His keeping wherever He hath led his steps."

The unwelcome intruder swore a passionate oath. "If the troublesome blabber and sedition-monger be not soon in my keeping it shall be the worse for the district that harbours him, I warrant you that, my worthy dame. And so, where think you he may be harboured now?"

"Where think I he may be harboured now!" echoed the lady with a curling lip, and an accent of contemptuous scorn in the usually sweet voice. "Count the homes for ten miles around Stirling, aye, every shepherd's shieling and ploughman's cot; then you may have some notion, perchance, of the number of the places wherein might lie sheltered the beloved friend and revered minister, James Guthrie. Ah! truly the Lord giveth the very holes of the rocks, the thickness of the heather, the dark cover of the night, for harbours of refuge for-"

But the uninvited visitor waited to hear no more. Effectually misled by Kate McCall's clever management, and reminded by her allusion to the night that its darkness was as a fact now falling, to the rendering of the scarcely-known road not a little dangerous for horsemen, the commander bestowed another oath upon his fruitless expedition, and led his troop away again from the precincts of Blair's Farm.

For that time the hidden minister was safe.





CHAPTER VIII.

DARK TIMES.

land of the purple hills, the glowing heather, and the multitudinous shadows, clouds, and changing tints, had robed herself in her fairest green, her loveliest skies, her sunniest smiles. Her roads gleamed white and bright, as they stretched away over hill and dale, and beside the sparkling burns.

A very gala day one might have declared that happy-looking first of June, and with the firm, clear roads, and sunlit mountain-sides inviting all who had hearts to answer to sweet influences to take it for a holiday.

Alas! It is for those who are happy to make holiday, not for those who are sad; and there was a great throb of pain felt far and wide in the land of the North that summer day, in spite of the spirit that was abroad breathing joy.

The Marquis of Argyle had been beheaded in the

High Street of Edinburgh but four days since, and to-day that "minister of the Gospel at Stirling" and at many another spot to which he travelled, that active, eager minister, James Guthrie, was to die.

Have a few words of history here, that you may the better understand the causes of these dreary tragedies.

After King Charles the Second was once fairly seated on his father's throne the English Parliament set to work, as quickly as possible, to pass "an Act of Indemnity for the protection of the large class of persons who had done acts of choice, or necessity, capable of any day bringing them within the letter of the law of high treason."

That was a very wise and prudent move, you see, on the part of the English, but the poor Scots did not manage so well. They had to wait for the meeting of the Estates before their Indemnity Act could be settled, and meanwhile a few unfortunate individuals could be picked out, who were obnoxious from one cause or another, and made victims of; since there was no law as yet to which they could appeal for protection.

The Marquis of Argyle was the first one selected. You could never possibly guess one principal reason why he was to be put to death; no, not if I gave you a month of Mondays to do it in, so I may as well tell you first as last.

It was chiefly the Marquis of Argyle's power and influence that had restored the throne to the Stuart

King, and, seeing that he was powerful enough to help a king to obtain possession of a kingdom, of course nobody could deny that he might very probably be also powerful enough to deprive a king of it again, if he should ever happen to wish to do so.

Humph! A very uncomfortable thought that was, certainly. People stronger than yourself may be very delightful to have for friends, if they can get you something you wish for but cannot get for yourself. But, when you have possession of the desirable object, no doubt you would just a trifle prefer that stronger person's absence to his company, if the thought came into your mind that he was likely to want your treasure himself.

Be that as it may, however, with regard to you, it was certainly so with King Charles the Second; and, adding to coward fear base ingratitude, he seized upon every possible pretext he could think of, or those about him could suggest, for the gratification of his purpose. He let the unsuspicious nobleman travel to London to pay his respects in all good faith to the new Sovereign, because it was ever so much easier to make a snatch at him in the English Metropolis than while he was in his own fine castle of Inverary. Then he had him taken and clapped into the Tower for a few days, till it was convenient to return him in a war-ship to his own country as a prisoner, and lodge him in Edinburgh Castle.

On the 13th of February, 1661, he was formally

accused before the Estates of High Treason, and in the spring time following, on that 27th of May, "he met his end with a firmness and calm dignity which has won for him a high place in the narratives of Scots heroism."

I give you that last sentence about poor Argyle in the hope that it may take the bad taste out of your mouth for you, of what goes before. For myself the disgraceful episode has a flavour as bad as that of a bit of cake mixed with a bad egg, and perhaps you may be unlucky enough some day to find out that that is anything but nice, as I have done.

Well, Argyle was beheaded on the High Street of that most beautiful of cities. On the very same day insult was added to injury by the passing of an Act for the restitution and re-establishment of the ancient government of the Church, by archbishops and bishops; and then the executioners were all ready to add another black day to that first one.

"It was determined to have another representative victim, and to take him from the Church. James Guthrie was selected."

The chief of the reasons why he was selected, I have already told you, was because he was a ringleader in drawing up that imperious "Supplication;" because he was one of the foremost of the daring "Remembrancers" to His Majesty of those extorted promises as to Covenant-keeping, etcetera, which His Majesty wished to forget.

But just to show you what manner of man this was, this Minister, James Guthrie. As Burton says, to give you some impression of his restless energy, and at the same time of the fervid natures, the indomitable resolution and industry, of the staunch Covenanters generally, I will give you the passage narrating some of the charges against Guthrie, given by that graphic historian.

"He did contrive, complot, counsel, consult, draw up, frame, invent, spread abroad, or disperse—speak, preach, declaim, or utter—divers and sundry vile seditions and treasonable remonstrances, declarations, petitions, instructions, letters, speeches, preachings, declamations, and other expressions tending to the vilifying and contemning, slander and reproach, of His Majesty, his progenitors, his person, Majesty, dignity, authority, prerogative royal, and government."

There! If that is not enough to take any one's breath away, I don't know what is. And remember, these charges are only *some* of those brought against the culprit! As they stand they might have been thought enough to crush the head of even this eager, earnest, hot-tempered, outspoken James Guthrie himself, without recourse being further added to the headsman's axe.

More folks than you and I would think that now-a-days, and act upon it, too. But in that dreary year of Covenant-burning, and perjured bishopmaking, it was ruled otherwise.

James Guthrie had a kind of forcible eloquence,

based in part upon strong convictions, and in part upon a natural talent, that carried along with him a considerable number of those who came within reach of his influence; and so James Guthrie was hunted, caught, and must die, bright though the earth and air and sky might be, and emphatic though a Saviour's words might be:

"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."

Perhaps the Christians of the 17th century did not read the First Epistle General of the Apostle John. There is a verse in it that might be written up as a living sermon, at the street-corners of the cities of all countries naming themselves after Christ. Its warning of the want of light might serve as a lamp to find it by.

"He that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes."





CHAPTER IX.

A MYSTERIOUS VISITOR.

VIE alone, and with a most sad face, sat in his mother's favourite sitting-room. At least, I said alone, but he had one faithful companion in the beautiful collie which

William had left yesterday in charge of the place; a most sagacious guardian of the homestead and the boy, although he could neither write nor read, nor speak anything but his own dog language.

Poor Wallace spoke that now most pathetically, with an occasional slow, heavy wag of his tail, and the solemnly pitiful look in his great soft brown eyes.

A dog is not at all a bad friend to have in seasons of trouble. It cannot torture you with words, and its sympathy is so unselfish and unmistakably sincere. But a dog cannot sound the depths of sorrow, and on that morning of the 1st of June, to which we referred in the last chapter, Ivie McCall's heart was as heavy as it is possible for so young a boy's heart

to be. And that is saying a great deal more than some people in their extraordinary ignorance or still more extraordinary forgetfulness imagine.

But now to explain how those two came to be each other's only companions that day. Mistress McCall and William Blair had done their best to save James Guthrie's life, and when it came to pass that he was to die they did their utmost to prove their devotion to their minister to the last. No personal fears were allowed to hinder them from standing boldly forth as his supporters, and no sooner had the widow learnt the fixed date of his execution than she set off for Edinburgh.

Early in the morning of the 28th, old Elspeth Spence had astonished the inmates of Blair's Farm by presenting herself before them as the bearer of bad tidings.

"How have ye come? and why have ye come?" asked her brother-in-law, almost doubting his senses as he looked at her.

And well he might, for since the affray in St. Giles's, on account of the new Service-Book, in the year '35, it was doubtful if she had walked above two miles at any time away from her own door. But strong excitement had at last given her inclination for a journey, as well as strength to perform it.

"I ha' coom upon my feet," she said, with a gleam of triumph showing for a moment through her grimness. "Not an hour had passed that Argyle's head was reived fra' his body, and that our Covenant —Hech! the villains, that they daured the deed!—that our Covenant was burned by the common hangman o' malefactors, than I was telled the news, and mair than that—James Guthrie is to have the same fate three days after this, for standing to it that a vow is a vow, an' that the Covenant is a fast bond on those that took it, which none may loose."

Ivie lifted horror-stricken eyes to her—"The same fate!" he repeated fearfully. "Do you mean that he is to be burnt?"

The old woman turned and glowered down upon him in a way that made him shrink back. She chuckled malevolently as she answered the question.

"No, laddie. He is no to be brent. They keep the burrning for the Covenant they ha' made wi' the Lord, and for ugly old women whom it pleases them to misca' witches. The Covenanted Minister is to have his head chopped aff, and it's to be made a gey fine ornament for ane o' the braw buildings i' Edinbro, if—"

And upon that word "if" she made so sudden a pause that all her three auditors were as startled by the unlooked-for silence as they would have been by some unexpected shriek.

Again the old woman indulged in her unearthly, unmirthful chuckle. Even with every nerve in her body quivering with excitement, and her mental faculties wrought to the highest pitch, she could still enjoy the spiteful and fantastic pleasure of playing upon other people's nerves and feelings. On most

occasions she would prolong the amusement indefinitely, until the more superstitious of her neighbours really did believe she must have entered into some black compact with the powers of evil, to enable her to guess so closely how to annoy them most effectually; and some of the more irritable took little more care than she did herself as to associating the ominous word witch with her name.

However, at the present moment Elspeth Spence had a far deeper motive in her sharp pause than to tease the curiosity of her audience, and checking her laugh she raised a long, lean forefinger as added emphasis to her speech, while she subdued her shrill tones to a hollow mutter, and repeating her last words, went on:

"Aye! James Guthrie's heid will e'en girn doon upo' the citizens o' Edinbro', sightless, dumb an' deaf, for mony a lang day, if those wha call themsels his freends dinna win him awa' fra' his bluidthirsty enemies, before they work their will on him. And noo' Elspeth Spence has said her say she will e'en gae her ways back to the one wha gied her a timely warning to say it."

"That would be the Reverend Mr. Welch?" said William Blair, half as assertion, and half question.

His sister-in-law put her arms akimbo, craned her neck forward till her face was within a couple of feet of his, and drew her eyelids together, sort of alligator fashion, until between them there was just visible one long, brilliant slit of eye, which gave a most peculiarly keen, cunning expression to her countenance.

"That wad be what ye wad think, would it?" she retorted in a tone of aggravating sarcasm. "And suppose I should say, that would na' be the Reverend Mr. Welch, what then?"

If William had done quite what he felt inclined to do, the "What then?" would have been a good shaking administered to the one who asked it. But unfortunately for the gratification of that pardonable longing there were three things against it—First, she was a woman; secondly, she was old; thirdly, she had put herself to the very great fatigue of a day and night's tramp to bring them these tidings of great, sad interest.

No; on all these counts, and others, he could not shake her, not even though she persistently baffled all attempts of his own, and of Kate McCall, to learn who had been her informant as to the dismal events past and to come in Edinburgh. For her own malicious gratification she let them discover that there was a mystery attached to the affair, and that was all.

But with regard to one thing, Mistress McCall did get the better of an argument with Elspeth. The old woman declared her intention to set out at once on her backward route, the lady declared her contrary intention of making her remain until she had taken both rest and a good meal. And the sight of the tempting repast that was speedily

spread upon the table eventually helped the lady to win the day.

Elspeth fell to upon the food with a wolfish voracity that made her companions doubly thankful that they had insisted upon giving a meal to such a famishing creature. But truth to tell, her greed was due quite as much to the rough habits of her long solitude as to hunger; and the frugal Scotch appetite was satisfied just where an English working-woman would have felt comfortably settled to the occupation of eating.

Having passed some hours in heavy slumber, Blair mounted her on horseback behind him, and carried her eight or ten miles on her homeward journey before they said good-bye.

"There," he said, as he checked his horse at last.

"Now I think you may manage to get over the rest of the road somewhat mair easily than if ye had taen your ain will in returning the morn."

"Humph," grunted old Elspeth; "ye've na call to go crowing over me. What I had undertaken I wad ha' made oot to perform. But I'll no gainsay that the mother o' your pet chick, Maister Ivie yon, gave me a toothsome denner."

Blair laughed. "Aye, I believe you. You shall never ha' had such another since ye were foster-mother to that bairn, the cousin I hear tell he is, o' our new Lord High Commissioner and Governor of Edinburgh Castle, John, Earl Middleton. Did ye e'er see your foster-child, by the bye, since he grew to man's estate?"

There was a short pause before the reply came: "Maybe, if he cooms whiles ben to Scotland I may ha' seen him, wha shall say?"

If her companion's surmises, with regard to a recent subject of discussion, had lain in any degree in the right direction, the slight hesitation and the constrained manner of the reply, when it was given at last, might have furnished a clue to the reading of a riddle. As it was, William Blair observed nothing more than his sister-in-law's usual chariness of speech and grumpiness of disposition, and having dismounted her, and listened with what degree of patience he could muster to some crabbed messages for his wife, he vaulted into the saddle again, and rode back to Blair's farm.

The night was far advanced when he reached home to find his wife and Mistress McCall together, and in their turn busy in preparations for a journey. Well he guessed whither it was to be taken, and the following day the three set off in company to the Scotch metropolis, determined, that whatever others might do, they at least would take care that the honoured minister should not be left quite alone in the midst of enemies in his last hours upon earth.

"Ah! if we could but rescue him!" sobbed Mary Blair.

Her husband's compressed lips, and hands clenched till the veins stood out upon their backs like ropes, told as well as speech could have done that it would not be his will that should be wanting in the affair.

Kate McCall's tears were falling for mingled reasons as she turned in the moment of leaving, and cast her arms around her child's neck.

"May the Father of the fatherless hold ye in His safe keeping, my child, my darling," she murmured through her weeping.

The boy clung to her closely. "Take me with you, my mother," he whispered imploringly. "What you are strong for I too will be strong to bear."

But it might not be. If there were to be the desperate struggle of an attempted rescue, so young a boy could be of no use, and would be far better kept out of harm's way till he were of an age to do brave deeds for the cause in which his father fell. And if—

And she shuddered as the dreary thoughts crowded into her mind. If the worst were to come to the worst, three days hence, then most assuredly it would be well to keep him afar from sights so terrible. By a desperate effort the gentle-hearted woman regained control over her emotions, and lifting herself up she said tenderly:

"No, my son, my darling, do not urge me to act with want of wisdom. I go to give my open testimony of adherence to our minister, and to his opinions, in so far as I may rightly comprehend them. For you, thy day to do so is not yet come. I have committed thee to the Lord's keeping for me until I return, and He

hath never yet failed those that trust in Him. And so, yet again beseeching the Almighty's blessing upon thee, my son, I bid thee a brief farewell."

"It is but a brief one, dear Maister Ivie," muttered William Blair, stepping back a moment from the horse's side, in his effort to add his word of comfort for his favourite.

But the period of time that doubtless seemed short enough to James Guthrie, awaiting his nearly approaching execution, in the dungeon of Edinburgh Castle, where it stands in its lofty pictures queness, overlooking the fair city, appeared to Ivie to stretch onwards to a distance that made his mental eyes ache to follow it.

Many a lad has thought that Robinson Crusoe's lot was the most enviable it was possible to imagine, but they would soon find a very few weeks of his desolate experiences enough to satisfy their fancies in that direction. A fortnight of utter loneliness would make you welcome with the wildest fling of your cap, and the most frantic shout of delight, even "that cricketing duffer who can neither bat nor bowl," or "that awful muff who always stands shivering on the bank for an hour, before he manages to squeeze up a farthing'sworth of courage to jump in."

Ivie felt terribly downcast and "eerie", as the Scotch expressive word pictures it, as he turned back into the empty house. For all his manliness and superior abilities, he was but ten years old, and he had four days, at any rate, to get through as he best might, alone.

He stood for awhile staring away over the moor, across the wide wastes of which his mother and her companions had passed out of his sight. There was a soft touch against his hand, and looking down he met the dog's wistful gaze up at him. A smile of thankfulness shone through his tears.

"Poor old Wallace!" he said. "How come you here? I thought you had gone too?"

Wallace rested his nose against the caressing hand and wagged his tail in a subdued way. He did his best to explain the state of the case, and it was not his fault, but the poor ignorant human creature's misfortune, if he was not understood. The simple fact was, that he had gone with his master, but William Blair's cogitations upon the young laird's dreary situation had led him to the happy thought of ordering his dog back, for the double purposes of protection and companionship; and Ivie's mother was grateful enough for the deed, whatever her son might be.

But even with Wallace to wander about with, and with Wallace to talk to, and to share his porridge with, and oatmeal cake, by the time the dread 1st of June had arrived Wallace's companion was as heartsick with loneliness, and with apprehension for the safety of those he loved, as the morning was beautiful. The sunny sky and the bright glow of light upon the mountain sides so jarred with his sorrowful feelings, that after the earliest hours of the morning he instinctively kept altogether within doors, and as the day wore on he even avoided the windows, shrouding his

sad face in the darkest parts of the house, until twilight should put on her chastened tints to sympathize with that day's sad doings.

It was already growing dusk when sympathetic Wallace, who had been lying stretched at McCall's feet, perfectly motionless and wide awake for a couple of hours past, suddenly lifted his head, and gave a low growl. With an eager start of hope that, in spite of the dog's growl, his mother might be at hand, Ivie dropped his hands from his head, and sprang to the door. He could get no farther. The doorway was blocked up by the very tall and broad figure of a man who almost completely filled the narrow space with his giant form.

Wallace lay down before the living barricade with bent head, lying stretched between that and the boy he had been ordered thither to guard.





CHAPTER X.

A VENICE FLASK OF PERFUME.

O rescue was possible. Things had been too carefully arranged, too much forethought in providing against possible contingencies had been displayed, and there was still glow-

ing too much enthusiastic affection for the King of a year's reign, to give any chance of success to the handful of those who would have adventured their lives willingly to save that of their minister. They might have sacrificed themselves, of course, if they had so chosen, by way of displaying their zeal in his cause, but they were too wise to act with mere vain foolishness. James Guthrie himself would have been the most indignant at such waste of good Covenanters, and the loudest in denouncing such mad folly, on the part of those whom he spent his last hours in exhorting to remembrance that they were the salt of the earth, and that they were those who were bound to keep alive the strong light of the gospel of truth which had been committed to their charge.

By favour, extended to them through some unknown

channel, Mistress McCall and her companions were secretly admitted to an hour's converse with the condemned man on the night of the 31st of May. As Mary Blair entered the dungeon a gleam of hope flushed her face, and the heavy door was scarcely closed when she darted to the prisoner's side, tearing off the plaid wrapped about her face and shoulders as she did so.

"Change with me, sir, and you can escape!" she muttered hurriedly, as she flung down the plaid at his feet, and prepared to unfasten the loopings of her upper skirt to lengthen it. But whether in her excitement her words were uttered more loudly than she had intended, or whether her actions were observed, and rightly interpreted, neither she nor her companions knew, when they were stricken dumb and still by a voice, they knew not whence, muttering in tones that were scarcely audible:

"It is useless. You are watched. When he might have got free he refused. It is too late now."

Whilst Mary Blair, her husband, and the widow, stood petrified, gazing at each other, the prisoner replied in tones low as those in which the women had been so mysteriously addressed;—

"Ay! Too late now for aught but a swift passage from the weight of mortality to a glorious immortality. Too late now for aught but a speedy flight into the glorious presence of the Lamb of God, the one and only Head of His Church, and my Redeemer."

L. of C.

For a full minute there was an awed silence in the dim prison-cell. It was broken at last by Mary Blair. Even this human life was a sweet gift of God to be duly treasured, in her estimation, and there was an accent of something akin to reproach mingling with her deference as she resumed her plaid, and murmured:

"Ah, sir, can it be true! Ye might have won to freedom, freedom to proclaim the Word o' the Lord again to the hungering sheep, and ye refused?"

The fiery impetuosity of the strict Covenanter, which had carried him once and again in times past within the border land of blind fanaticism, was subdued to a diviner spirit now that he was close to the valley of the shadow of death. During these past weeks he had been standing aside on life's pathway. The fever and turmoil of intercourse with his fellow-man was amongst the bygone things, his communing now was with the Spirit of God, the Comforter, who shall abide with those, who love the Lord, for ever.

It almost seemed to the Blairs and to Mistress McCall as though some other than their own well-known minister spoke to them, when James Guthrie raised his penetrating eyes to Mary Blair, and answered her with a serious gentleness that went to his hearers' hearts:

"It is true, my friend, that ye say, that I might ha' won to freedom i' this world, and that I refused. For I must have won to that poor, perishing freedom

through the slavery o' a lie. And as it is too late now for aught but rejoicing, with joy unspeakable, at the nigh prospect of being for ever with the Lord, so is it also far too early, methinks, for one to win this world's goods by lying. We must enter the service of another master if we would have a time come for doing that. But, mind ye, my dear, dear friends, and all ye who can hear me—"

And at those words he raised his voice—"Mind ye, that master who gives away this world's gifts as payment for lies, has for ane o' his titles, 'Sin.' And the last wages he pays is death. I will not, for my pairt, my brethren, to win those wages. It liketh me better that I choose eternal life."

As he ceased, that hushed and muffled voice that came from some undiscovered quarter, spoke again, and hurriedly:

"I did not fix upon the lie, by which to aid your escape, from choice, believe me. But by that road lay my only hope for your deliverance; would that it had been otherwise! I crave your final blessing and your prayers."

"You have them, my son," breathed the minister.

Kate McCall was quite unable to restrain her curiosity. Stooping low over James Guthrie she whispered: "Who is it? Who is thus mercifully anxious to befriend one whom others thus barbarously condemn?"

But her curiosity was doomed to disappointment. "I know not, for a certainty, who it may be,"

replied Mr. Guthrie. "But were I forced to guess, methinks I would not be far oot if I said it was nane ither than—"

And at the critical moment, when he was about to pronounce the name, an interruption came that was final. The dungeon-door was flung open, and the visitors were hastily and peremptorily summoned to depart. No further leavetaking even was allowed.

The morrow came, and found William Blair, and many another like-minded with himself, standing as near as was permitted them to the gallows upon which James Guthrie was to be hung. Elspeth Spence was also there, squabbling with the crowds in general, friends and foes alike, and earning for herself many a fierce reprimand, and more than one blow with the flat of a sword, for her loud denunciations of the day's proceedings, and the pusillanimity of those who pretended friendship for the victim, and yet did not fly at the throats of those others by whom he was to be done to death.

One of the most imperative and stern rebukes she received was administered furtively, by a very giant of a man, young, and richly dressed, and evidently belonging to the party of the Government. Favoured by the confused masses of the people, and the constant surgings to and fro, he contrived with considerable difficulty to reach the side of the old virago, as though by accident, and to remain there long enough to mutter in angry remonstrance, and with the air of one well-known to her:

"Hush ye, for a foolish old fool that you are! You are endangering your own life, and more than that, bringing ridicule upon the cause for which you man is about to die with such stern bravery."

What menaces and blows had not been able to effect, this man's reproof instantly accomplished. The old woman assumed an almost cringing aspect as she perceived him by her side, and muttering in the most earnest entreaty:

"Ach! dinna you speak harshly to me, I canna bear it, I will na speak anither worrd aboon my breath this day, I promise;" she fell humbly back on to the outskirts of the crowd.

Somewhat further removed from the dismal mélée and turmoil, Mistress McCall and Mary Blair waited for the tragic end, their frames convulsed with sobs, their weeping eyes hidden low in their handkerchiefs, within the screening plaids, which the lady as well as her attendant wore on the present occasion, closely folded about the head and face.

The executioners having ascertained that their victim was dead, the body of James Guthrie was taken down from the gallows, and the rest of the sentence passed upon him was carried out, by his head being severed from his body with the headsman's axe.

This was the dismal moment anxiously awaited by the numbers of weeping women in the concourse assembled at the minister's death. Disregarding their natural feelings of horror and repugnance, they pressed around the officers who had just performed their ghastly task, and dipped their tear-bedewed handkerchiefs in the flowing blood of the slain Covenanter. The Register, Sir Archibald Primrose, looked on with mocking scorn, and exclaimed with real or assumed indignation:

"How now, dames! What is this I see? For all your dread of Papistry, here are ye imitating one of the grossest pieces of the idolatry and superstition of the Romish Church, in its gathering of the relics of the saints."

A slim, graceful maiden close at hand, turned upon him with a grave and solemn dignity:

"Not so, sir. We guard this precious blood of the innocent, that it may be a remembrance of perpetual consolation to us, that right dear in the sight of the Lord is the blood of His saints."

So strong was the feeling of the populace now grown, on the side of admiration and regret for the bold and conscientious preacher, that it was found expedient to humour it so far as to permit his friends to have possession of the dismembered trunk, which they forthwith placed reverently in a coffin, and carried to the Old Kirk aisle.

A number of ladies followed, all anxious to show the strength of their respect by sharing in the duties of preparing the body for its burial.

Whilst they were thus engaged in these sad offices the door of the church opened, a tall, closely-enwrapped figure stepped quickly in, closed the door behind him as quickly, and hastened up the aisle, till he reached the spot where Mistress McCall stood with Mary Blair, folding the hands of the dead man reverently upon his breast.

Without a word the new-comer held forth a rainbow-hued crystal phial, long and thin, and with a curiously-formed gleaming stopper, which, when he drew out, permitted an exquisite perfume to escape, filling the whole building with its sweetness.

One moment he waited, until the hands were finally composed, and then, with the same haste which had characterized all his movements, he poured the whole fragrant contents of the glass vessel over the mortal remains of James Guthrie, and turned to depart. Impulsively Kate McCall laid her fingers on his arm, looking upwards to the muffled face high above her of which even the dark grey eyes were scarcely visible.

"God bless you, sir!" she said, in her low, sweet voice. "He will most surely bless you for this labour of love which you have shown to the slain body of a servant of Jesus Christ."

The stranger bent low in acknowledgment, and then gently disengaging himself from the detaining touch he made good his escape from the kirk, silent and undiscovered as he came.

On the evening of the following day Ivie McCall's pale face and heavy eyes regained some portion of their wonted colour and brightness, when Wallace, after sitting up in an attitude of profound meditation for some minutes, at last bounded on to his four feet

with a perfect scream of a bark, indulged in a series of jumps and gambols which he had considered far beneath his dignity for many a month past, as only suitable to the age of puppyhood, and finally dashed through the window, and helter-skelter across the yard, and over the low stone wall, tail flying in the air like a new kind of pennon as he scampered away over the moor, out of sight.

Ivie's lips parted with a smile, the first that had appeared on them for the space of five days.

"William is very near at hand, that is sure," he said sagaciously. He lifted the smouldering peats to lighten them, and let the air fan them into a hotter and more vivid glow; he filled the porridge-kettle, that hung over them, placed upon the table spoons and basins and a great bowl-full of the new milk he had brought in an hour ago, put out a platter of oatcake, fetched new-laid eggs from the hen-house, and then, having made all the preparations that lay in his power for the comfort of the returning travellers, he considered himself justified in following Wallace's example. Not, indeed, in the bounds and barks and gambols, but in popping out through the window, and in tearing across the heather, in the direction indicated by the dog, at a pace that may have led the small fry hidden in the flowery depths to imagine that the human fairy tale of seven-leagued boots was come true.

The porridge had been made, the eggs cooked, and these, together with a goodly portion of the oatcake,

eaten, by the weary travellers who had not partaken of a regular meal since they had set out for Edinburgh.

The whole of the little party, including Wallace of course, were now sitting resting in the spence, looking more comfortable, and greatly refreshed. Though how they can possibly have been so, without having had one single cup of tea even between them, I confess it utterly passes me to understand. Once tired, always tired to the end of one's days, it seems to me, if it were without the bounds of possibility to get hold of a teapot filled with its legitimate contents, and piping hot.

However, happily for the poor unfortunates of those centuries, no prescience told them of the enormous luxury to be enjoyed by their successors of a future age, and so they contrived to feel satisfied without it.

But those remarks are only to fill up the time whilst Mistress McCall and the Blairs are waiting for Ivie's return.

"I have something for you, mother," he had said a minute since, with sudden recollection and an air of mystery. "But with the joy of having you at home again, I had forgotten it."

And with that he had run off to fetch this thing, whatever it might be.

"Some little paper he hath written for me, perchance," said the lady. "But yet, if that were all, why the mysterious look and tone? No. On second thoughts she did not believe in the likelihood of this suggestion of hers, and her companions had not done so at all."

But there was short time for speculations. The boy came back holding his plaid bundled in his arms, with the object, whatever its nature, certainly not writings one would judge, evidently concealed within it. Crossing the room, he stood before his mother, and began gravely:

"Ma'am, ye will not be knowing yet that I ha' e'en had a visitor since you left for the city."

Kate McCall looked at her child with some slight surprise. "Aye, Ivie, that may be. Wayfarers are few and far between that come night his lonely spot, that is true. Still we are not wont to count it surpassing strange when one does approach our door. Ye forgot not the law of hospitality, I trust?"

At this unexpected question McCall's eyelids sank for an instant, and his face flushed. He certainly had forgotten that law for once.

"But in very truth, mother," he continued firmly the next moment, "not only I, but ye yourself, I reckon, would have had your mind filled too full wi' other thoughts yester night, to have room in it for every-day affairs. It was nigh past the gloaming when my visitor came. The chamber was o'er crowded wi' thick shadows, as though ghaists were thronging to fill the places ye had so lang left empty. I had covered up mine eyes to shut them out. I was not wholly feared o' the naughts, but yet, mother—"

His lips trembled, and kneeling down he laid his

bundle on the floor, and dropped arms and face into his mother's lap.

"Mother—I did know that the Lord was standing by, but—but—the time was fearsome. It was nigh ten o' the night by the dying light, and I was sair tired, but I could na' sleep—and oh! mither, mither, I did weary so for ye."

A tear dropped on the boy's sunbrowned hand. A tender hand caressed his sunny hair. Five days' solitary confinement has been known to quell even stout men's hearts. It was not surprising that nearly a week of loneliness had told somewhat heavily upon the high-wrought susceptibilities of a young boy, living in times when those in the prime of age and intellect were not ashamed to believe in witches, warlocks, and all the rest of the miserable and mischievous delusions.

To change the current of his memories, Mary Blair said cheerfully: "No doubt, my bonny bairn, ye did weary for her, and so a good bairn should. But ye have her the noo, and we are a' fain to hear what it is ye ha' getten for her. Will ye no' let us see it, and tell after how ye came by it?"

That was a very artful suggestion of Mary Blair's, for she pretty clearly divined that it was one that would not be at all welcome. His past fears and miseries dispelled by a present very vivid, but exceedingly harmless alarm, Ivie lifted his face again from his mother's knees, and laid his hand quickly over the plaid as he answered her:

"Nay, nay, Mary. It will pleasure me rather to tell ye my tale first, and show ye the braw giftie I have hidden intil this, afterwards. And, mother dear, it was no' just a wayfarer, so to be called, was my visitor, neither, nor in need o' any hospitality that I could offer him. He was a grand man, young and pleasant-looking, though wi' a touch maybe o' haughtiness in his face, so much as I could see of it through the darkness."

"Did you find him in the yard, dear?" asked his mother.

Ivie shook his head vigorously, and turning, pointed his finger at the room-door behind him. "That is where I found him. And how and when he came there, I cannot tell. Wallace just gave one wee bittie growl, mair like as though to warn me, than as if he were onyways angered. And I took my face oot my hands, and looked where Wallace looked, and I saw him. A' the doorway was just filled wi' him. It seemed to ha' grown a mere wee bit slit, like as when Dame Elspeth Spence screwed up her eyelids yon morn, till only a narrow line o' her eyes showed through. The door-way was too narrow for him, and too low for him. He was tall-so tall-and his shoulders broader even than William's, but thinnerlike. And he smiled till I thought o' the sun-ripples in the burn, when he stooped low, low down, and said: 'Good old Wallace, good old guardian, take care of him till his mother comes back, and his friend William.'"

At this point in the history there burst forth such a tumult of wonder and questionings, from all the three listeners, that it seemed as though the narrator's breath would all be exhausted before he got a chance to end it. But, however, the questionings did come to a finish at last, when it became fully evident that Ivie could give them no more satisfactory replies than that:

"Yes; the mysterious stranger-guest did evidently know Wallace, and something at least of Wallace's master, and of the other inmates of Blair's Farm. And he thought it was equally evident that Wallace knew something of the stranger."

But how much either knew of the other he could not say, neither did the stranger tell him who he was, where he came from, nor even his name.

"He only gave me this," wound up Ivie, at length opening his package with the greatest care, and taking out a beautiful, many-hued crystal phial. "He gave me this, and told me it was for my mother, And that I was to say to her—'The giver thought she might value it, in remembrance of that day, and that he would she should guard it carefully, as it might prove of use to me, should I ever be led to follow in my father's footsteps, and perchance come to need a friend.' He made me repeat the words thrice, as though he misdoubted my memory. And then, while I turned to place the wee bit bottle on yonder shelf, as he bade me, he was gone."

Mistress McCall scarcely heard the concluding

words. The phial in one hand, its curiously-twisted engraved stopper in the other, she sat as though she were in a trance. The Blairs appeared to be equally spell-bound, and the subtle aroma of some exquisite foreign perfume filled the whole room. There was no mistaking that phial, nor the peculiar fragrance it still emitted, although the contents had been poured more than thirty-six hours ago upon the headless body of James Guthrie, as it lay, safe at last from all pain, at peace from all restless indignations and anxieties, in a coffin placed in the aisle of the Old Kirk in Edinburgh.

Why the flask had been brought to Blair's Farm, and given into the keeping of Mistress McCall, remained a secret which that wondering little company had to trust that the future might reveal.

Each in turn twisted it about in their hands, as though they imagined that by the superlatively strong exercise of their wishes glass might be taught to speak, and prevailed upon to tell all it knew about its late owner. But telephones were not invented then, much less talking-bottles possessed of powers for satisfying curiosity. And so the mysterious gift was put away at last, with a sigh, amongst the lady's few cherished treasures that remained to her after the despoiling of her home. And few indeed they were. She had lost her husband, and all worldly gear in the cause of the Covenant and the King. Had she lost them on the King's account only she might now have

obtained restitution. But there was little chance for her to find favour at Court, when her plea lay chiefly in this, that her husband had held fast to the king because he was a *Covenanted* King.

Gladly would that same Covenanted King have got hold of the copy of the Covenant which bore his signature, if he could have discovered its whereabouts; and gladly would he have banished to the antipodes all those who had any hand, direct or indirect, in forcing him to sign it.

To be welcomed as King by his Scotch subjects, that was agreeable enough to this second Charles. But even already, in these early days, men had discovered very fully that one of the best ways to win hatred and hard usage from him, was to remind him, by word or deed, that he had held the affections and good offices of his northern subjects by the subterfuge of a pretended adherence and devotion to that Covenant which his easy-going, pleasure-loving nature abhorred.

One of the most earnest of his mentors had been Graham McCall, and he had died on the battle-field. Another, far sterner, had been James Guthrie, and his head was now spiked on the nether Bow Port. Mistress McCall clasped her child tight, and shuddered as she thought of what might further befall.



CHAPTER XI.

THE NEW BISHOP OF DUNBLANE.

HE night of the 15th of December, 1661.

A room in a London house, dimly lighted, and scarcely warmed by a low, smouldering fire.

But the one occupant of the apartment was neither conscious of the cold nor of the darkness, as he knelt beside a table with his head buried in his hands.

It was upon the stroke of midnight, and he had been kneeling thus ever since he had been able to effect his escape from the company of his entertainers, between eight and nine o'clock. He was praying with a fervency none can understand but those who have passed through some great and terrible crisis in their life.

That day of December had been made notable in the two kingdoms of Great Britain by the ordination, in the splendid Abbey of Westminster, of an Archbishop, and three Bishops, ordained to St. Andrews, and other sees in Scotland. The ceremonies had been gone through with all pomp and splendour of pageantry that was possible. Some touches of more than ordinary ostentatious magnificence had been added, partly, perchance, to pleasure the arrogant and sumptuous tastes of the renegade Covenanter — James Sharp—the new Primate for the North. And partly also, no doubt, in stern scorn of the Presbyterians' horror and dismay, at the infliction upon them of the hated and ceremonious Prelacy, whose names and forms they abhorred so utterly, not only for themselves, but as certain forerunners, according to their rooted belief, of the dark errors and miseries of the Papacy.

The consecrations over, congratulations, equally weighted as the ceremonies had been with double purposes, poured in upon the new prelates. The Archbishop and his fierce colleague, Fairfoul, Bishop of Glasgow, received all civilities, graciousnesses, and obsequiousnesses, with lifted heads, proud smiles, and the air of accepting them as matters of course and their due. But with one of their brethren it was far otherwise.

Robert Leighton, the new Bishop of Dunblane, was noticeable, even in that scholarly and polished gathering, for his ample forehead, and for the noble refinement that marked his face. Just now there was a deeper and more earnest expression in his eyes than was even their wont. One of his English compeers went up to him with outstretched arm and words of greeting.

"All hail to you, my brother Bishop. Allow me to offer you the right hand of fellowship."

Robert Leighton lifted his own, and laid it in the other's palm; and replied in tones that rang through the group gathered around him.

"Gladly do I accept the fellowship, my brother, as I do that of all Christians. For one is our Master, even Christ, and all we are brethren; with Him for our Lord, so long as we humbly seek grace to do His will."

Almost it might have been supposed that the Christian words contained something nauseous in them, or a poisoned sting, with such a mingling of disgust and haste did the Englishman release the fingers which he had just clasped, and retreat to more congenial companions.

There were many good Christians in England in those days, never think otherwise, but the circumstances of the times—those pushing, struggling, raging times of strife—brought men to the fore, as a rule, who were self-seekers to such a degree that they put worldly advancement before their own lives even, let alone the lives of others. It is little wonder if the poor "Scotch bodies" seldom found themselves able to see round the broad shoulders of these enemies of theirs, to where other men stood, who were as true as themselves to the pure faith of Christ.

Englishmen, prelates, popes, and persecutors, were all one word, or words with one meaning, to many thousands of individuals living north of Berwick, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. On the other hand, many thousands of those living south of the Border believed actually, whilst others pretended to believe, that a Scot, a fanatic, a fool, and a rebel against all constituted and lawful authority, were also one and the same individual, taking the thing as a rule, one from which the exceptions were few.

The English Bishop, who beat a retreat before what he scornfully stigmatized as "the new Bishop's cant," mentally decided that Leighton at any rate was no exception to the rule, but was as worthy to be ranked amongst "the barbarians," as any one of his wildest, most unlettered countrymen.

Muttered ejaculations and whispered comments to his friends and acquaintances, together with a generous bestowal of significant looks for the benefit of bystanders at large, quickly made others aware of his low esteem for this one at least of his fresh colleagues; and Robert Leighton was left in peace, free from fulsome flatteries which were ever recognized to be unwholesome by his honest taste, and uncalled upon to answer to congratulations which he felt were so singularly out of place under present circumstances.

Ever and again he gazed round upon the beaming countenances of his three companions in the recent consecration, and each time his feelings of bewildered shame increased, till they threatened at length to overwhelm even his calm, faith-sustained reason.

"For the sake of peace," he murmured to himself, "for the sake of peace did James Sharp urge me to join him in this step. 'For the sake of promoting peace,' he said, and to save our poor country from yet other possibilities that would bear with them yet deeper stings of mortification."

"For the sake of peace," he reiterated yet again, as he escaped that night from the crowded and princely withdrawing-room of those who were alike his hosts and the hosts of the Scotch Archbishop, during their stay in the English Metropolis.

Leighton had never attempted to disguise from himself the fact that, although the step he and his brethren had just taken might be the lesser of two probable misfortunes, yet that it was, itself, a misfortune, and a fresh mark of degradation for all who bore the name of Scotchman.

No wonder, then, that he was astounded, and shocked to the very depth of his sensitive conscience, when he saw his fellows bearing themselves with the boldest assumption of haughty dignity, and glorying in their new position, as though they had attained to it by their superior worth and merit, instead of being thrust into it, like so many captives, by their enemies.

The heart of the new Bishop of Dunblane was heavy almost to the breaking-point as he knelt there in the solitude of his dim room, pouring out his soul hour after hour in prayer.

As his mind dwelt upon the unexpected attitude of his companions under the new circumstances, his heart was torn with distracting, torturing doubts as to the righteousness of his own conduct in throwing in his lot with theirs. Clasping his throbbing head yet more tightly in his hands the words burst from him in a very agony:

"My Father!—Thou knowest, Oh! my Father, that I have longed to act according to Thy will."

And the Heavenly Father did know it, and so fully set His gracious seal to the knowledge that even to the present day Scotchmen do not grudge to admit that one good Bishop, even of modern times, has dwelt among them, that one compatriot still merits to be reckoned amongst their brightest lights of the 17th century, yet claims to be accounted a Christian of most noble life and exalted faith, although he broke through his Covenant vow, and his name is Robert Leighton.

Meanwhile, however, at that present instant of time there was one person at least in the world who did not approve of him, and his recent doings.

As his last audible word of supplication died away in a long-drawn sigh he was startled by the sound of a deep groan, immediately behind him in the room. His blood seemed suddenly to freeze in his veins. His breath stopped. For some moments he experienced all the horrors of that mysterious terror which is, itself, capable of inflicting death.

It was a well-enough known fact, in those days, that many a one of the extreme party of the Covenanters would esteem it a glorious act, and one wellpleasing in God's sight, to destroy public renegades from the solemn bond. And even such a man as Robert Leighton might be forgiven if, like Peter, his faith faltered for a short space when he felt the waves of assassination were about to close over his head.

But the period of horrible suspense was brief as it was unexpected. A second of those deep breathings, or groans, added a moral gloom to that already pervading the apartment, and then a voice spoke, in tones that mingled caution with its sternness. There were just two words only:

"Robert Leighton!"

But, spare as was the address, it was sufficient to give back the flow of blood through the Bishop's veins, and the power of breathing to his lungs. He recognized the voice, and with the recognition came the assurance that he was in no imminent jeopardy of life or limb from his present unlooked-for visitor. Rather was it, instead, for that guest that his fears began to grow, so soon as they were allayed on his own account. He sprang to his feet with a smothered cry.

"John Welch! Is it thou!!"

The intruder came nearer, till he stood within two feet of the other. "Aye, thou renegade," came the reply, in the same subdued but weighty tones—"Aye, thou renegade from all that the worth of Scotland holds most dear. Aye, it is even I, John Welch, who have penetrated into the lion's den that I may

acquit my conscience of the duty borne in upon it by upbraiding thee with thy faithlessness."

For a moment the Bishop shrank back with another of those heavy sighs, from the harsh words; but thought for his companion once more took the upper hand, and stretching out his arm with a gesture of anxiety and warning he muttered hurriedly — and without heeding the impatient indignation with which his opening address was received:

"My friend, my brother in the Lord, escape hence instantly, I beseech thee, I implore thee. Know ye not that there hath, e'en now, been put a price upon your head great enough, in these grasping days of hasting to be rich, to tempt the powerful as well as the weak, to try to deliver thee up into the hands of your enemies?"

After his first outburst, at the titles given him, John Welch stood silent, with folded arms, and fixed eyes regarding the speaker until his adjuration was finished, then he replied coldly:

"Ye ask, Robert Leighton, if I am cognizant of this! Verily, backsliding hath already been permitted, as might be foreknown, to cloud the fine judgment that of old marked thee out as one of wisdom's children. How think ye I had penetrated through the midst of those who thirst for my blood, even to this inner sanctuary, if I knew not enough of my danger to use the Lord's means to guard myself from the blasphemers? Nay then, as I tell ye even now, right well I know that I stand here at my peril

in the den of lions, and that your noble host himself would never hesitate to win the three thousand marks, the price of my blood, should he but find he had so choice a prize placed within his grasp. But what—"

"But what of that!" he was about to ejaculate, with cold scorn, when his friend interrupted him with the imploring plea that he would not then continue to risk a life so valuable, by remaining in a situation that he knew to be of such great peril.

For first answer to this plea the visitor drew up a seat beside the dying embers on the hearth, and held his fingers, rather mechanically than for the slight hope of warmth, over the dull cinders. Then turning his head half round back to his companion, he said slowly,

"If you, Robert Leighton, have so wholly cast in your lot with the adversary, that you are ready to betray me, ye can do so. Otherwise, I am safer here for the next five hours than in any other spot on earth. Who, think ye, would seek the remonstrant, a framer of the Supplication, the uncompromising Covenanter, John Welch, in the chamber of the new Prelate, Robert Leighton, the renegade to his vow, to his country, and to his honour?"

He ceased, and Leighton in his turn stepped up to the cheerless fireplace, and, mindful of hospitality, as a Scotchman ever is, he busied himself with restoring heat and brightness to his room, while he said in still lower tones than before:

"For mine honour, that I have laid long since in

God's hands. He will guard it for me. For my country, that I love so greatly in the Lord, that for its sake I have wrung my heart by the taking of this step. For my vow—we sware to the Covenant not in a spirit of hostility to English Episcopacy, as I read it, but as a measure of defence against the arrogancies of the Papal hierarchy, and the dark errors of the Romish superstitions."

John Welch lifted those keen, strong eyes of his again, with their fixed gaze, to his host's face.

"Aye, fellow-countryman—for brother I may no longer call you. The children of the light can have no fellowship with the children of darkness. But to pass by that till I have answered you. Thou hast spoken truth, in part. But yet—even to take the question wholly on your argument—we did so swear, and an oath is ever an oath."

"Even when it is a Herod's oath, that takes away the Baptist's life," said Leighton. And he stooped lower over the lighting coals as he continued—"No, no, Welch. The Lord Himself knows that my heart is sore enough with pain and miseries; but in His sight I dare at least affirm that my soul is free from the guilt of perjury."

"How may that be?" was the stern retort. "You signed the Covenant. Do you deny it? can you explain away the fact?"

Robert Leighton continued busy with such host's duties as were possible in his present circumstances. But he to whom he tried to minister impatiently

pushed away the little travelling wine-flask and the biscuit.

"Answer me," he said imperiously. "Do ye deny that ye signed the two Covenants?"

"I do not," said the Bishop. "But will ye not eat and drink such poor stores as remain from my recent journeyings? You look faint and exhausted."

"I am both," was the cold reply. "But it is from wrestling in prayer for thee, and not from want of meat. Man shall not live by bread alone. Nay, verily, as James Sharp shall find, when the rich things of this world shall turn to ashes in his mouth. But for you—you confess you signed the Covenants?"

"I have never denied it."

"Then how say ye ye stand not now perjured in the sight of God? Hark ye, ye Bishop of Dunblane, this is one portion of the oath ye took—

"'II. That we shall in like manner, without respect of persons, endeavour the extirpation of Popery, Prelacy, that is, Church government by Archbishops, Bishops, their Chancellors and Commissaries, Deans, Deans and Chapters, Archdeacons, and all other ecclesiastical officers depending on that hierarchy.'"

He pronounced the last word almost with a shout of triumph, so full and clear did he consider that testimony on his side of the argument. "There!" he exclaimed, with increased sternness, "how say you, now that ye stand not perjured if you signed the Covenant?"

The Bishop of Dunblane bowed his head with another of those bitter, heart-wrung sighs.

"Press me not to-night with yon bitter questionings, my brother," he implored, with noble humility. "Scarcely to myself can I explain the reasons that have made my present path seem right; to another, excepting to my Lord and ever-loving Master, it is impossible."

Stern John Knox's stern descendant shrugged his shoulders, something of contemptuous pity for the sorrowing deserter from his own favoured camp beginning to mingle with his wrath.

A constrained silence fell between the two, and had lasted for some time, when at length Leighton drew up his head again, with a certain air of dignified resolution that at once attracted his companion's alert attention.

"Well," he said quickly, "have thy cogitations lifted thee out of the quaking moss, and landed thee on the firm ground again of that first true faith and Covenant? Do ye fling from ye these new trammels of Satan, and return with me to the scattered, outcast sheep, wandering without shepherds upon the mountains?"

"Even as thou sayest," was the slow reply. "But wait——" For the other had impetuously risen, and made as though to seize his hand. "I am about to return to those poor sheep of the Lord's flock. But my teaching to them shall assuredly not lead them to look upon the darkest side of such trials as the Lord

Himself permits should befall us at this time. You have quoted to me one portion of our Solemn League and Covenant, I will quote another next following paragraph to you.

"'III. We shall, with the same sincerity, reality, and constancy, in our several vocations, endeavour, with our estates and lives, mutually to preserve the rights and privileges of the Parliaments, and the liberties of the kingdoms; and to preserve and defend the King's Majesty's person and authority, in the preservation and defence of the true religion and liberties of the kingdoms; that the world may bear witness with our consciences of our loyalty, and that we have no thoughts or intentions to diminish his Majesty's just power and greatness.'

"In the present juncture these two paragraphs militate the one against the other. It is a sad thing, and one that sore perplexes our finite minds, when the choice lieth but between a choice of evils. But you and I alike are both breakers of our covenanted vows; if so we must make sorrowful avowal. I, indeed, by becoming a bishop, and you by throwing contempt upon the King's Majesty's person and authority, as ye have done e'en now, by hectoring him, and resisting his commands. Even furthermore—you ignore that portion of the fourth paragraph that speaketh of such men as 'evil instruments' whose words, or conduct, or writings tend to 'divide the king from his people, or one of the kingdoms from another.' No, no, my brother, believe me, men's wisdom is finite,

and those who framed our Covenants, noble as they are in purpose, saw not all the roads, nor all their goals, to which the very fulness of the oaths must lead us. You, out of the abundance, choose that which best suiteth with thy nature, when it cometh to the sorrowful necessity of a choice. I also choose that which meseemeth best for my beloved country, and above all, that which I believe hath in its observance the greatest promise of preserving that brotherhood and peace which is the very spirit of the Gospel."

John Welch started up to his feet with blazing eyes, and the impassioned action of his arms, and play of feature which had attracted to him such vast congregations from far and near during some years past, and had kept attention riveted upon his discourses with a sort of awe-struck fascination.

"Speak not to me in such strains!" he shouted, with utter disregard to the imminent peril of his position as a proscribed man in an enemy's house. For James Welch ever had the courage of his convictions, at any rate. "Speak not to me in such strains! Were these Gospel times ye might preach to me of living up to the Spirit of the Gospel. But, man, they are not!"

And with a sudden excited gesture he folded his arms across his chest, only to fling them wide again as he continued with rapid utterance:

"These days are far from those days as the east is from the west. We are fallen upon the times of Tyre and Sidon, upon the age of the Amalekites and the Philistines. And Agag was hewn in pieces according to the word that went forth from Jehovah, for all weak Saul's compassion for a foul king steeped in sin. 'And Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the—'"

At this point the minister's powerful voice rose to such a pitch that Dr. Leighton in his turn started up, and with an unexpected hasty pluck at his companion's sleeve contrived to pull him back on to a seat, and to check his tirade at an especially opportune moment.





CHAPTER XII.

A PAIR OF FRIENDS.

UR last chapter ended with the sudden interruption of the onslaught upon degenerate times and degenerate people which was being made by the vigorous tongue of that uncompromising Covenanter, John

Welch. Lest there should be an attempt to renew it, Dr. Leighton pressed one hand upon his friend's mouth and raised the other warningly.

There were noisy, unsteady steps in the corridor. The men of the company from which Robert Leighton had withdrawn several hours ago had

been drinking much wine since then, and were now rolling up-stairs to their bed-chambers in a state that would have been a scathing disgrace

to a four-legged brute. But these creatures were two-legged animals, and "lords of creation," so of

course they had a lordly right to disgrace themselves. At least, one may presume that is the

way they would have argued the matter, had they

ound it expedient or amusing to discuss the question at all in any light.

Most of the party were too intoxicated to pay much heed even had a thunderbolt fallen at their feet, but one or two of the number being what is sometimes called 'hard-headed,' or of exceptionably strong constitutions perhaps, had not reached the stupidly heavy or sleepy state, and were in a condition of rude boisterousness.

"I say," said one of these to a companion, as they mounted the stairs, "is it not along the corridor yonder that my cousin hath appointed the quarters of that most demure and sanctimonious Scots parson, Dr. Leighton?"

"Aye, by my truth I think so," was the quick answer. "Have you any thought for a good prank we can play off on him e'en now?"

There was a delighted gleam in the speaker's eyes at the prospect of perpetrating a piece of mischief. But the other shook his head regretfully, or at least it so appeared.

"It cannot be, Bernard. My cousin cares little enough for his Scotch guests, I dare avow; but yet he would be angered more than enough to have them suffer harm or annoyance whilst beneath his roof. 'Noblesse oblige,' you know."

"Humph," came the grumble of disappointment at losing the hoped-for sport. "What did you want to remind me of the fellow's neighbourhood for if I am to be debarred reminding him of mine? I feel

inclined to revenge myself on you, by giving you a helping hand over the balustrade down into the hall below."

The other threw up his head with a resounding peal of laughter, which came as the first timely warning to Robert Leighton, above his friend's stormy declamation.

"All right," said the laugher. "Do the deed if you can; I give ye free leave, my fine fellow, and yet further, I promise that no struggles of mine shall let you from the mighty deed."

"If you were not such a mighty weed, and I were but ever so little—"

"Ah, ha, ha," laughed the broad-shouldered giant again. "Intend you that for a joke, my very lofty and noble Bernard? For if you are not already 'ever so little,' I pray you to inform me what you are."

"Not such a long-tongued chatterer as you, Savile," was the retort. "I say, an' I were but ever so little more than my five feet nothing, or thereabouts, I would at least make the attempt to take you at your word. Giants are a nuisance in the world, you understand. They have always their heads and shoulders in the way of tidy-sized folk, and are a sort of perpetual eyesore and insult."

"Bravo, Bernard," said Henry Savile, giving him a clap on the shoulder that almost sent him back to the hall again in reality, down the stairs, if not over the balustrade.

The same hand that sent him staggering caught him, however, and held him in a firm grip, while Savile drowned the irritated remonstrance cast at him by continuing his own speech.

"Bravo, tomtit. If you only cultivate that shining wit of yours with a little care I truly believe you may become competent for Court fool in time. You may reckon upon my good word, and you know I never grudge my labour or fair speech to do a service for a friend."

Actually true as that statement was, apparently the tomtit's plumes were ruffled for once somewhat overmuch by his chosen friend's rough handling. He vouchsafed no reply, pleasant or otherwise, to this last sally, and wrenched his shoulder away from the supporting hand with a force that a second time threatened to overbalance his unsteady legs. But with all his faults Henry Savile was good-tempered, and he took his companion in charge again, swinging him up with himself on to the safe, level ground of the corridor, along which their rooms lay, as well as that of the Bishop of Dunblane.

"There," he said, "Sir Surly, now I will allow you liberty to take what care you can of yourself. But if you had gone headlong below there whilst in my company, some of your hot-tempered relatives might perchance have taken a fancy to have a tilt at me, without thinking it needful that I should have due warning first."

"Whatever they might have done, our fine priest yonder is seemingly bent on warning us that he is saying his prayers," rejoined Bernard, already half-oblivious of what he had felt cross about, and startled almost into soberness by the stern-voiced shouts of John Welch which now fell upon his ear. They were matched out there in the corridor by a corresponding shout from the stentorian lungs of Henry Savile, given, as his friend supposed, in the mere spirit of impudent bravado, but it served one good purpose, in nerving Dr. Leighton to his resolute attempt to check his companion's fanatic carelessness.

Scarcely had he forced Welch back into his chair than there came a succession of thundering raps at the door from the two young men, accompanied by scarcely-subdued oaths from Bernard. The bishop turned pale with fears for his visitor, and hesitated to give any answer to the uproarious summons. Not so the minister.

"Avaunt! sons of Belial!" he exclaimed, as he pulled away the restraining hand from his mouth "Avaunt, and make not the holy calm of night hideous with your drunken clamour. Get ye to your beds, and seek sleep. If that bring ye not to a better mind it will at least stay ye from tormenting those whom ye should make it your delight to treat with reverence."

"Say on, most reverend father and Lord Bishop, say on," called Savile through the door, ceasing to thump on it directly he had managed to extort an

answer, and casting a hurried, furtive glance at his companion as he thus addressed the person who had called out to them.

"We are all ears, my Lord Bishop," he continued with a noisy laugh. "But my friend and I have ventured thus to summon you to speech with us, on that very account that you make mention of. We are now getting us on our way to our beds, and since we are as desirous for our own parts to obtain that sleep which you recommend as you can be that we should have it, we stand here as petitioners to you, that of your grace and condescension you will make your devotions in a somewhat lower key than that which well nigh startled us into broken necks a minute since. Have we your favourable reply?"

Whether they had or no was of small consequence, for, with a repetition of the tumultuous laughter, the boisterous pair moved away from the door, and passing on along the passage were shortly shut into their own apartments, one of them at any rate wholly unconscious that he they had had speech with was not the meek-spirited peacemaker, Robert Leighton, but the hunted, impetuous John Welch.

An hour before dawn he and the new bishop parted. They parted as those part who in the depths of their hearts are at one in Christ, whatever greatness there may be in outward-showing differences, and who know not when and where the next meeting shall take place.

They saw each other in this world no more. But

one was their Master, even Christ, and they were brethren. The same man who said once, in the burning excitement of his hot zeal and eager love—"Lord, wilt Thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them?" said afterwards, "Little children, love one another." "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. . . . If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and His love is perfected in us."

The most hearty, the strongest prayer that every one of us in the world should pray is, that God of His infinite grace will grant unto each one of us to have springing in our hearts that charity, that love, which St. Paul tells us is the "fulfilling of the law."

Outward forms will be of very little consequence when our dear Saviour's love for us is imitated by us for each other.





CHAPTER XIII.

WILLIAM BLAIR OFFERS A CHOICE.

T is a very uncomfortable thing, as Robert Leighton declared, when two duties appear to pull us in opposing directions. It is also painfully miserable when gratitude

and affection are thrown into opposite scales; and thus lay the matter with Mistress McCall a few weeks after the English ordination of her brother, Robert Leighton, to the Bishopric of Dunblane.

Many and many a time she had offered up most fervent prayers that God might so please to order events as that this learned and most Christian brother of hers might come to reside somewhere in the neighbourhood of Blair's Farm. She would have been most thankful to have the comfort of his ministrations, to replace those of the minister of Stirling, hung six months ago. And even more to her mother's heart was the wish that her only child might be advanced by his uncle's scholarship and noble example. And now her prayers were answered, as it seemed.

Dunblane was not much more than seven miles distant from Blair's Farm. A mere trifle of a walk to be taken once or twice a week by a sturdy Scots boy, and not anything of a forbidding distance even for herself.

But, alas! what of that! There were far more insuperable obstacles to be overcome than any distance of hilly road that might lie in the way of the hoped-for companionship. The prayer that circumstances might bring her beloved brother to reside near to her own home was certainly answered, but in such a way that poor Kate McCall found the hoped-for intercourse almost more difficult of attainment than it had been before.

The roof that had sheltered her and her homeless child for the past ten years she owed to the loyal generosity of William Blair. It was he who had provided them with food to eat and clothes to wear throughout all that length of time, and he had come to her that morning with a face pale with pain, for the pain he might be going to inflict, or might be called upon to bear, but nevertheless as set and hard with a fixed purpose as though the features were moulded of cast steel.

"What is it, Blair?" asked the lady, not expecting his presence at such an early hour, and greatly concerned at his expression, although she did not suspect that it had any immediate connection with herself. "Have you learnt any fresh bad tidings, Blair, since we parted yesternight?"

He bent his head. "Even so, my lady, as my

heart taketh it. The Bishop of Dunblane, as men style him, hath arrived at the dwelling hard by, which hath been appointed him."

Forgetting the man's cold aspect and stern tones in her own sudden gladness at the news he gave, Mistress McCall clapped her hands together with a momentary return of the gay, glad spirit of her girlhood's days, when her joyous nature had made sunshine in her home. But almost as soon as it had arisen her brightness faded again. Her companion regarded her with quivering lips and a frowning brow for an instant or two, and then said with penetrating coldness:

"Yea, the renegade from the kirk, the perjured Covenanter, the comrade of the base and infamous betrayer of the party whose cause was entrusted to his pleading, the accepter of a title that he hath professed to despise, hath come to pollute his country's air, hath come to dwell among us as one of the living monuments of our national disgrace."

He paused. His companion sat with bowed head and tightly knotted fingers, seeing clearly enough now the vanity of her rejoicing, and marvelling how it had possibly come to pass that the scales had been over her eyes all these weeks.

Day by day, frequently almost hour by hour, of late, William Blair had repeated his scathing denunciations of James Sharp, and he had not spared to include all such others as were spoken

of as his colleagues, so soon as it was published abroad that Sharp was not the only minister who had consented to accept the imposed honours. And yet, from some cause or other,—from that strange obtuseness, perhaps, that affects most minds occasionally on some points,—Kate McCall had never associated her brother's name with her servant's wrath, not even with her own sorrowful indignation at the overturning of the almost idolized kirk of her country.

From her earliest childhood she had been a witness to the beauty of the Christian character of her brother Robert, to the fair and noble Gospel teaching that the example of his life bestowed on all that witnessed it. He and her husband had been at one in all things. Even now, in the awakening of her dormant reason, it seemed a thing almost preposterous to her, that the blame of wrong-doing should be imputed to such an one as he.

In the soreness of her wounded love and disappointment she grew angry. "If my son may but grow up to walk with such devoted love and meekness in the footsteps of his Saviour, as his uncle hath ever done from his youth up, I care not though he let the world call him fifty bishops, aye, the very Pope himself, if in their poor foolishness they shall so will. Ye go too far, William Blair; ye strain at our Covenant until ye are like to split it, an' let a' those through thegither that it hath held within its fold."

He drew away from her as she spoke, backing as close to the door as possible, and there he stood stiff and straight, the whole of the rugged stolidness of his nature more apparent than it had ever been before to its witness. There was a harsh, grating sound in his voice besides as he gave his answer.

"Nay, my lady, it is no the honest straining, to haud it tight in its appointed place, that has sair torn the Covenant. The Covenant itsel' is hail and soond enough still, as aye honest pact must be whilst honest souls are fand to keep it. But some cast away their faith o' wilful will, and other some—" and there he broke off with a significant pause before he repeated with slow emphasis:

"And other some let their grip get so slack that when they little think it the edge sinks doon beneath them, and they slip away o'er the side! It is no the tight straining, it is the slack holding that gi'es the evil one the chance he is aye watching to take advantage of. And lest he draw me also down below I am here to tell ye now that no roof o' William Blair, the Covenanter, can gi'e shelter to those, whae'er they be, wha elect to hold communion with those who ha' thrown shame upon the holy cause. A choice maun be made. The Bishop o' Dunblane shall ne'er be said to be the freend o' those to whom Blair's Farm is hame."

And, with that for his final word of declaration, Blair opened the door instantly and decamped, waiting for no immediate answer, and, indeed, leaving Kate McCall in such a state of perturbed trouble that it would have been quite out of her power to give a coherent one at that minute if she had tried.

She wrung her hands when she was left alone, and sobbed like a child in her feeling of utter helplessness. "I had no idea he could be so hard," she murmured piteously. "I had no idea he could be so hard."

Had she been able to see him, at the very hour that she was thus upbrading him, she might still have used the same form of speech, but, if she had, she would have felt greatly tempted to add—" So hard to himself."





CHAPTER XIV.

TASTING SORROW FOR THE CAUSE.

H, Maister Ivie! Maister Ivie! I ha' e'en made an idol o' ye, and now—"

"Ay, of course ye have," broke in an unexpected voice upon the lamentation.

"I ha' telt ye that lang syne. An' noo, I doobt, ta forward bairn will ha' broken his neck, or maybe drooned himsel' in ter milkpail?"

William Blair had hidden himself away in an old disused barn when he retired from Mistress McCall's presence. He had offered her a choice in obedience to his conscience, and he saw plainly that she would make her choice against him, well-nigh to the breaking of his faithful heart. But for all this he never wavered.

Herein lay the strength of the Covenanters, the enormous vitality of the Covenanting cause, and the sublime example they set for the whole religious world, so long as time shall last,—

God first—before all things, in their hearts, minds, souls, powers of body and brain, the Covenant of love

and service they had voluntarily made with their Lord. Human ties, fears, hopes, trials, temptations, everything that is incident to human life, had existence for the Covenanters as well as for us. Don't forget that. But they said—

"Our Divine King first. We have entered His service, and are under a bond to do His will. And, thus bound, servants can neither choose their duties nor the conditions under which they shall be performed."

William Blair had subscribed the Covenant, wherein, "with hands lifted up to the Most High God, he," individually for himself, "had sworn, really, sincerely, and constantly, through the grace of God, to endeavour, without respect of persons, the extirpation of prelacy."

Blair knew the words by heart. Not only in parrot-fashion, but they had become, as it were, a part of his very self. It was so with thousands of his countrymen and women. And it is a dismally sad and terrible thing for English folks to have to remember that, at the point of the sword, by cruel fines and imprisonments, and by tortures still more barbarous, English people professing the pure faith of a restored Christianity tried to force them to forswear themselves.

No attempts were made at persuasion, at reasoning, at argument. Nothing was tried but harsh laws and brutal force; and the example in this case was certainly better than precepts for the purpose of

enraging the lookers-on, who saw men who had also taken the vows of the Covenant perjuring themselves as time-servers, for very carelessness' sake, or for self-interest.

The fierceness and disloyalty subsequently charged against the Covenanters were due not to the Covenants, but to utterly uncalled-for harassments and persecutions. It is well known, that by a sufficiently sudden alarm the most timid of animals can be terrified, not into running away, but actually into turning to face the enemy.

The Covenanters, as a body, were averse from strife, and from the opposition of violence to violence. They claimed a right to hold to the Reformed religion according to their own forms, and they held with a life-and-death clutch to this claim. For it they submitted to obloquy, to being deprived of their goods, to being driven as penniless wanderers from their homes, to all manner of minor persecutions, and contented themselves with protesting, to holding fast their profession of faith without wavering, and with determinedly refusing to be coerced into giving up ideas that to them, at any rate, did actually represent right as opposed to wrong.

But somehow there is something in the very act of persecution that encourages itself. Those who indulge in it grow to revel in it, and to crave for a full satisfaction. As it is said of that awful Judge Jeffreys, that he delighted to inflict misery for the sake of seeing the wretchedness of those upon

whom it was inflicted, so it may be said of all persecutors.

If you gave a child a hammer he would not return you any thanks for the gift if he had to use it only on a mass of wool or a feather-bed. He would wish to hammer away at something hard, and the more resistance the better, so long as he felt the tool firm in his hand. So it was with those who persecuted the Covenanters. They wanted to feel that they were hammering away at something that was really hit hard by their hammer. So they beat away at the human wool till they actually succeeded at last in beating even that into a compact, hard mass. They had fined them, they had imprisoned them, they had beggared them, they had driven them forth, houseless exiles, to die of exposure and starvation. And all had been borne.

This was too provoking! Doubtless persecutors do not say so, but they feel it to be so, from bullying boys up to bloodthirsty despots. They much prefer the power of hard hammering at something that resists. The Covenanters were hammered into resistance at last. So-called Protestants took to hunting their Protestant brethren to death, hunting them with dogs! shooting down husbands before the eyes of their wives at a minute's warning; hanging young lads found with Bibles in their hands in their mother's sight; piercing the straw on barn floors with drawn swords, by way of an easy killing of those who lay concealed beneath.

Macaulay gives a few instances of the barbarities exercised during the short reign of James II. Many similar ones occurred from time to time during the years that his brother was on the throne, so these are not dismal exceptions to the general treatment, but the rule.

"John Brown, a poor carrier of Lanarkshire, was, for his knowledge of Divine things and blameless life, commonly called the Christian carrier. He was so peaceable that the tyrants could find no offence in him except that he absented himself from the worship of the Episcopalians. On the 1st of May he was cutting turf, when he was seized by Claverhouse's dragoons, rapidly examined, convicted of nonconformity, and sentenced to death. Even among the soldiers it was not easy to find an executioner. His wife was with him, and even those wild, hardhearted men shrank from butchering him in her presence. John Brown spent the minutes of dread pause in prayer, loud and fervent as one inspired, till Claverhouse himself, in a fury, shot him dead."

A few days later two artisans were taken in Ayrshire. The poor prisoners "were charged, not with any act of rebellion, but with holding the same pernicious doctrines which had impelled others to rebel, and with wanting only opportunity to act upon those doctrines. The proceeding was summary. In a few hours both were convicted, hanged, and flung together into a hole under the gallows."

A poor widow, aged, and a young girl only eigh-

teen years old, for refusing to abjure the Covenant and attend Episcopal service, were killed in a way copied from the old barbarous heathen times of the persecutions of the Christians.* And these were Christians, these imitators, these were those who had accepted the gospel of One who says:

"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."

These two companions, the unflinching old woman and the brave young girl, were carried to a spot which the Solway overflows twice a-day, and were fastened to stakes fixed in the sand, between high and low-water mark. The elder sufferer was placed near to the advancing flood, in the hope that her last agonies might terrify the younger into submission. But the courage of young Margaret Wilson was sustained by an enthusiasm as lofty as any that is recorded in martyrology.

She saw the sea draw nearer and nearer, but gave no sign of alarm. She prayed and sang verses of psalms till the waves choked her voice. After she had tasted the bitterness of death, she was, by a cruel mercy, unbound and restored to life. When she came to herself, pitying friends and neighbours implored her to yield.

"Dear Margaret, only say, 'God save the King!'"

^{*} This history has been so doubted and denied that even on Macaulay's authority I might have hesitated to repeat it, but I am told, by a Scotch Presbyterian minister, that it is vouched for by certain testimony.

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The poor girl, true to her stern theology, gasped out:

"May God save him, if it be God's will."

Her friends crowded round the presiding officer.

"She has said it; indeed, sir, she has said it."

"Will she take the abjuration?" he demanded.

"Never!" she exclaimed. "I am Christ's. Let me go."

And the waters closed over her for the last time.

There is an equally pathetic story told by a writer who learnt it from descendants of the gentle sufferers' own families. I will give it to you now, that you may see for yourselves that nothing in my tale can be an exaggeration on the unhappily shameful facts of that almost inexplicably miserable page of our history, when strong religious convictions were goaded to fanaticism on the one side, and thirst for power united to an obstinate imperiousness, on the other, urged itself to a relentless barbarity.

In beginning his "owre true tale" of the lovely Marion Cameron, the old Scotch minister writes: "Murders were now common in the fields, and many were shot by the soldiers without trial, and without even warning. Marion Cameron was sincerely attached to the cause of the Covenant, when she, with two friends, was surprised by a party of the dragoons, and the whole three fled for their lives. They hid themselves at last in a moss, and, being overpowered with fatigue, they cowered down to rest. In this situation, helpless and exposed, they engaged in prayer, and resigned themselves entirely to the disposal of Him in

whose cause they were suffering, and for whose sake they were willing to lay down their lives. Having been refreshed with the consolations of that gracious Spirit by whose influences they were enabled to approach the mercy-seat with the voice of supplication, they rose from their knees, and raised to heaven the serene and melodious sound of praise, by chanting one of the psalms of the sweet singer of Israel, which seemed to be adapted to persons in their situation.

"The troopers, who on this occasion had followed them, could not fail to be guided by the hallowed and plaintive sound to the very spot in the midst of the morass where the worshippers had hidden themselves. The soldiers, on coming up, offered the girls their lives if they would burn their Bibles.

"Such a proposal, revolting to their holiest feelings, they rejected with abhorrence, and were willing, far more willing, to part with their lives, than to desecrate the Word of God—that Word of grace, by the consolations of which they were supported in their sufferings, and by the faith of which they hoped to be saved.

"However, the troopers had well known that their disgraceful condition would be rejected. They had only offered it to give themselves an additional pretext for proceeding to extremities. Accordingly, they at once avowed their intention to shoot them on the spot, as persons who refused to obey the King's authority in this, as in other respects.

"There was no alternative; the defenceless company in the moss could not yield, and they could not fly and therefore the threatened death was of course inevitable. The dragoons, without the slightest compunction, immediately prepared the instruments of death; they fired, and all the three fell prostrate on the heath, and the warm purple stream of life mingled with the dark moss water in the moor, and their redeemed spirits were conveyed by angels from their mangled bodies to the mansion of eternal blessedness. Their enemies appeared to conquer, but they who fell were really the victors. 'They overcame by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony: for they loved not their lives unto the death.'

"They were buried in their clothes where they fell, in the moss.

"About seventy years ago, while some cattle were trampling in the place exactly over the graves, their feet turned up part of the clothes of Marion Cameron, which were then in a tolerably good state of preservation, owing to the antiseptic quality of the moss in which they were embedded. And a large common yellow pin, which she was accustomed to wear in her raiment, was found and cherished as a precious relic of one whose memory was held so dear."

But to return to William Blair in his barn. He was quite a typical Covenanter, warm-hearted and peaceably disposed. Slow to be roused to the fiery pitch owing to his Scotch stolidness, but of that intensely strong and resolute nature that nothing mortal can either turn or bend it, without the voluntary assent of its own will.

In the future, persecuting enemies made the attempt; at the present hour he was tried through his affections, but he both times came off conqueror.

The news that old Elspeth Spence came to bring him:

"As warning frae ane that is a grand frien'," as she said mysteriously, only served to strengthen him in his conviction that the McCalls could not righteously be permitted to remain his friends, if they were friends and companions with the one-time Covenant member the Bishop of Dunblane.

He could as easily have parted with his eyes as part with Ivie. But either would be given up at what he believed to be the Divine will, and so, a few days later, amidst the heavy weeping of Mistress McCall and Mary Blair, the pale-faced grief of Ivie, and the outward coldness of William, except when he muttered hurriedly, "Tak' the dog, Maister Ivie, ye maun tak' the dog," the lady and her son went forth from the home that had sheltered them so long. It might be that, even in that age of embittered feeling, those who loved the Lord with pure hearts fervently, might, although on the opposite sides of human invention, see through the mists of prejudice to grasp each other's hands in the fervour of Christian love. But in the hour when William Blair watched his laird's widow and child depart from his roof, to seek shelter with the Bishop of Dunblane, it seemed to him that Kate McCall was voluntarily uniting herself with the spirit of evil.

To tell the truth, she almost felt it to be so herself, when the rumours Elspeth had carried to Blair's Farm were confirmed a few months later. The full tide of trouble had set in for the Covenanters as soon as James Sharp was fairly seated on the Archiepiscopal throne. One of themselves had gone over to the opposite side, and, as is usually the case, he was amongst the bitterest of their enemies, although it was in enforcing penalties, and not in helping to pass Acts that he was most vigorous against them.

In 1662 an Act was passed turning every one out of any public post they held if they would not consent to declare that "the Covenant, and National League and Covenant, are of themselves unlawful oaths, and were taken and imposed upon the subjects of this kingdom against the fundamental laws and liberties of the same."

By that, you see, unfortunate creatures who were not firm-minded, and who dreaded to lose their daily bread, were actually made to declare that the very things that proved their liberty were against their liberty. It was as if a law were passed to force slaves to swear that liberty was slavery.

Then there followed another Act, turning all ministers out of their churches and manses who would not consent to be presented to them by bishops, the very class of men that the ministers regarded with such especial abhorrence.

Of course a large number refused to have anything to do with these bishops, and did get turned out to make way for episcopal curates. The congregations followed the "outed" ministers to any cottage, bit of moor, mountain-side, sheltered glen, or dry bed of a burn, where their beloved outcast pastors would stand and preach to them. John Welch was one of the first to begin ministering at these field conventicles, and at them Ivie McCall and Blair had the intense happiness of renewing their intercourse almost before the privately shed tears on the boy's cheeks had had time to dry.

But even this happiness threatened to be short-lived. Heavy-footed and downcast, Ivie returned one evening to the peaceful little cottage, which Robert Leighton had hired for the accommodation of his sister and his nephew, that the widow might live undisturbed by the many jarring elements which even he could not keep out of the Episcopal palace, standing in the midst of an austere Presbyterian land.

In spite of the lingering soreness still in her own heart, Mistress McCall was as keen as ever to note the signs of anything amiss with her boy. He was scarcely within the door of the cottage before she marked the slowness of his usual alert steps, and the shadow on his clear open brow.

"You are o'er-wearied, my son," she said, with tender solicitude. "Come hither to this seat beside me, and take thy supper. It awaits the eating, for you are late."

Ivie obeyed the loving words so far as to cross over to the other side of the room, and drop down on to the low wooden settle, but at the platter of oatmeal-cake and the bowl of milk he shook his head, and then pushed them from him farther on the board, with a fit of passing impatience. His mother looked at him with slight surprise.

The inmates of that small abode lived too frugally to give much opportunity for quarrelling with their bread and butter. It is for those who dwell in the midst of abundance to indulge in that luxury, not for those who measure the amount of their meals more, perhaps, in accordance with their purse than their appetites. Moreover, a Scotchman's dictionary is nobly devoid of the words "epicurism" and "daintiness." Certainly Ivie's was, as attached to eating and drinking.

"Have you supped with your uncle, my son?" asked Kate McCall.

Ivie shook his head again. "No, ma'am. Unless I have supped on words. And indeed that I do seem to have done, for they ha' full satisfied my appetite, and I can no eat mair the night."

There was a quick glance at him of momentary vexation. "Words, my Ivie! Surely ye have not entered into unseemly controversy with one so good, so noble, and so much thine elder and thy friend, as thine uncle! If such be so I must forbid thee further communication with William Blair for the present, for it will be he, and none other, that can have influenced thee to behave so unbecomingly and unlike thyself. William Blair hath sorely disap—"

At this point Ivie started up. He had been making ineffectual attempts to check his gentle mother's unusual flow of words throughout, but now he could bear no more.

"Oh! mother, hush!" he exclaimed. "I pray thee, hush! William Blair hath disappointed no one, and he and my uncle Robert Leighton are more of accord, for all the outward distance they keep, than perhaps any other two people in the world. I see both of them many times a month, and each time I understand better what St. Peter meant when he wrote: 'Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow His steps.' You do not know what a life of constant denying of himself my uncle leadeth now. Why, mother—"

And the blue eyes filled with tears of admiration. "Why, mother, even those of the Royalist party who live, meseemeth, in chief part upon sneering alike at friends and enemies, have no sneers for him. And those of our side, who erewhile contemned him for his change from the covenant to prelacy, are constrained to admit that there may be a wider gulf than they had thought for, between error and sin; for that he hath fallen into the one by wrong judgment, but nowise into the other."

Mistress McCall's eyes sparkled with delight at hearing the praises of her beloved brother thus sounded by her beloved son. She drew him back to his seat, kissing away the tears.

"He is indeed a true follower of his Lord, my

child," she murmured with lips quivering for thank-fulness.

Ivie returned the caress. "Ay, mother, and William is but his fellow. We ought to know that well. Many a time have ye told me what he hath done for us in our sore need, and I tell thee, many a one can repeat the tale, since the ministers' puir wives an' bairns ha' been ousted fra hearth an' hame."

His eyes again grew dim with tears, at seeing which the other pair filled for sympathy, both with the supposed cause and with their sadness.

"You will have been hearing tell of some case of extra hardness, my son?"

The drooping head signed a negative. But the next minute it was lifted with the spoken answer: "Ay, truly, ma'am, that have I, indeed, although I shook my head as though I would say no. But I meant only a denial to your thought, and not to your words. The case of hardness my uncle's household hath been discussing this afternoon, is not one of individuals here and there, but of cruel oppression for us all; with worse to follow, I overheard one and another mutter to each other, as I passed."

Mistress McCall clasped her hands. "What is this first step that hath been taken on the cruel road?"

"First step," echoed Ivie. "Hundredth step I would ra—"

But he in turn was interrupted. "Nay, my bairn, I mean the first of these immediately present steps

for our harassment, of which ye have now heard. Doth it threaten to touch us all?"

"So William said, when he crossed my path, on my way hither," was the reply. "Our conventicles have been denounced as unlawful meetings and nurseries of sedition. In Glasgow an Act hath passed ordering all such of our faithful ministers as have still remained in their parishes to turn out before the 1st of November. Think, mother, of that. Before the 1st, and we are already past the——"

"Already past the 1st of October, and the bitter winter time coming even now upon us," cried his hearer, taking up the sentence. "Why, my bairn, my bairn, may the Almighty forgive their wickedness! But they must have it in their wills to drive the ministers and their families not only forth of their parishes, but forth o' the world besides."

Ivie McCall's boyish-smooth forehead contracted with pain. "That is what one muttered jeeringly, some hours since, mother, would be a good clearance of the King, His Majesty's dominions. William saith that already the citizens of Glasgow call the Council that hath passed the cruel Act 'The Drunken Parliament."

"Because of their barbarous unwisdom?" asked Mistress McCall. "It may well seem that they should deserve the name."

"It is not only in seeming, but for the reality's sake, that they deserve it, if all that is said around here be true," said Ivie. "The report is that there

was never a man among them but he was drunk all the time, except only Lockhart of Lee, and he said that this proclamation will lay the country desolate, and increase the hatred to bishops, and confusion among the people."

"Ay, truly! What else can our blind-eyed rulers expect?" murmured the widow thoughtfully, as to herself. Then aloud again she asked: "And what saith William Blair to all this, my son; seemeth it that he is greatly roused to wrath?"

He paused for some seconds, gazing forth of the window, as though he would glean an answer from the withered brown bracken shivering beneath the sharp October blast. Perhaps in some sort he did.

"No, mother," he said at last, slowly, "I saw no wrath in his countenance, as he spake with me upon what we had both heard, neither did I hear any in his voice. Something though there was, but I cannot tell what it was. I could not then, I cannot now. He knelt, wrapping a weakly this year's sheep in his plaid with one hand, whiles he spake, and with the other he held his bonnet on, as though he feared some gust of wind that might blaw it frae his heid. The wind hath risen now to such a height that I suld na have taken note had he done so now, but then it was full calm. The blue smoke frae this chimney-lug rose up sae brawly, like a wee bit slim pine dressed in the purple mist. But all the while William sheltered the sheep, and held his bonnet close grippit doon upon his heid."



CHAPTER XV.

"WITH WORSE TO FOLLOW."

HEN Ivie McCall told his mother of the increasingly strict edict, that had gone out against the Presbyterian Ministers, he said he had heard it rumoured that worse was to follow, and the dismal surmises were but too quickly and too fully justified.

As has been already said, when the people's favourite Covenanting Ministers were turned out of their kirks for holding to the Covenant, their Covenanting congregations turned themselves out of the churches too, and the new episcopal curates had to perform services to bare benches. This was a matter of great depression to such of them as were well-meaning, of perfect indifference to a wretched number who only took the benefices as a means of livelihood, but to the Archbishop of St. Andrews it presented food for passionate rage and malice.

The renegade step he had chosen to honour, by taking it himself, should be copied by the whole of

his countrymen in outward seeming, at any rate, if not in heart. Of course it need not be said that the King, Charles II., and his Lord High Commissioner, were quite of the same way of thinking, seeing that they had themselves made the Archbishop to begin with. And so, those in power being of one bad mind in the matter, there only remained to frame and pass another Act. One that is clear to us now, as being stupid as well as oppressive, but which was a very heavy misery in those years to the people against whom it was directed.

"The people have left their churches empty, have they?" said the law-makers. "Humph! Then we will just see if we cannot make them fill them again. Every one who does not go to the churches where our curates do duty shall be fined just as heavily as we choose, or even as those choose to whose rapacious hands we entrust the gathering of the fine."

"The Bishops' Drag-net," we are told, this was called. But close and stiff as its meshes were the fishes kept out of it. The plunderers got rich with fines, certainly, as far as the poverty of the land would allow, but the churches remained well-nigh as empty as before.

The sturdy, faithful people would give up all of this world's gear, but their consciences belonged to God. Those they would yield to no man's keeping; they were God's.

But wait—A brilliant idea occurred to the inventors of these cruelly oppressive Acts. A whole great

number of these resolute Covenanters were necessarily weak women and old folks; if they would not yield to threats and fines, in the matter of going to church, they should at least be prevented from having the comfort of attending the irregular conventicles held by their own ministers.

There was an Act of Council published called the "Mile Act." By this it was made law that no minister who refused to have anything to do with the bishops should be allowed to remain anywhere within twenty miles of his old parish.

There were other regulations as to where he might not be, besides. But the especial one that chiefly affected these shepherds and their flocks was that which placed this prohibitory distance between them. And to crown all, a special new tribunal, called the "Court of High Commission," was re-established, with the fullest possible powers to hale before them all such ministers as should still dare "to intrude themselves" in the parishes whence they were exiled, and all such people as did not "orderly attend Divine worship, administration of the Word and Sacraments performed in their respective parish churches by ministers legally settled for taking care of these parishes in which those persons were inhabitants."

Good care was taken that all these laws against their liberty, and their national form of religion, should be known to Scotchmen. They were published throughout the length and breadth of the land, and acted upon as soon as published. "Ah! Maister Ivie," groaned William Blair one day, stepping suddenly across his path as he came from a morning's earnest study at his uncle's. "Have ye heard of the new judgment Court and its powers against our freedom?"

Ivie bent his head. He had indeed heard the subject freely enough discussed by some of those about the palace.

"And to think," went on Blair bitterly; "only to think o' the kind o' men that we are ordered to learn the way to Heaven from! Even were we na' forbid to ha' aught to do wi' them by our Covenant vow, wha could gae to kirk to listen to such false shepherds as they are! Self-seeking robbers wha ha' climbed o'er the wall. Do ye know, Maister Ivie, it is actually to these new shepherds o' the poor sheep that the Government has entrusted the chief care o' gieing in the names o' those who keep away fra' the kirks! And mony, mony a ane o' these fause curates ha' already earned money by betraying members o' the poor flocks to the Coorts o' Justice!!"

"Of Justice!" echoed Ivie with burning cheeks.

"Of injustice I should have thought you would have said."

A "dour" smile flitted over the man's face. "The Lord be praised for this, Maister Ivie, that He has e'en keepit thee true in heart to the cause, for all your present temptations."

McCall fixed his eyes upon his companion reproachfully. "As I have told you before, William, I repeat.

What you call my present temptations are widely apart from such as you imply. They are temptations not to cling less closely to the Covenant, but to lose hold altogether, and for ever, upon Charity—the Golden Law."

He stopped a moment or two, and then went on more vehemently—"The true way to learn a full respect for the blameless lives and the fair speech of Covenanters is to witness the manner of life, the habits, the conversation of those amongst whom my lot has been in a measure cast the bygone months."

Blair drew up his head sternly. "And yet ye would have me suppose that the Bishop of Dunblane still merits to be considered a member o' Christ an' heir o' Grace."

The young face grew softened in its expression. "Aye, William, verily if there be ane upon this earth, in these evil times, that the Lord wills to confess for His follower, Robert Leighton is ane. Those wha coom about his home are not himsel'."

"Nay, but a man's friends, I reckon, are pictures o' himsel', like enough to tell himself by, fairly weel."

Ivie shook himself impatiently. He had argued this matter with the dogged, straightforward Covenanter many times already.

"William, it is too bad of you to give way to prejudice, like this. Those of my uncle's own household, those of his own choosing, and who abide under his good influence, show forth the good fruits of his example. But for aye there are others coming and going, some from the Court itself, some from the Lord High Commissioner, and all these drink and swear, and bide na long enough to pay heed to precept or example that might help them to be shamed into better things. Then there are curates aye pestering for parishes, and aiding their pleas by bringing lists o' those ministers in far away places wha ha' not yet been found and outed fra their kirks. Mony o' these consort wi' the Courtiers, and fairly outdo them in ways and words that it wad shame ane o' our ministers to speak of."

"And that it should shame ye then, Maister Ivie, to see and hear," rejoined the man indignantly. "A bairn o' twelve years old in the midst o' the Philistines and a' their sickedness—What is thy—"

But he was hastily interrupted. "I am not in the midst of it, William. I only see it, so to say, by the wayside. And what I see I hate and despise. The ancients used to make their slaves drunk, we are told, in order that children might see how hideous and ridiculous drunkards became, and so might learn to shun the vice. If you, and my mother and uncle, had wished to think of a plan for fixing my heart firmly to the Covenant, you could not have discovered a better one than this, of letting me see what those are who reject it, and who spurn those who hold to it as though they were animals lower in the scale than dogs."

The rigour of his companion's face grew a thought less stern, but his accent was still dubious, as he retorted: "Hech! then, and you may be right. The Lord of His mercy grant it may be sae! But since ye find sae mony guid reasons for maintaining a high respec' for yon Bishop o' Dunblane, I suppose ye'll be applying next for the honourable post o' page in the household o' the man they ca' Archbishop o' St. Andrews?"

The effect of this question was startling and unexpected. It was no sooner asked than, without a word of reply, young McCall turned short away from his companion, and dashed off, headlong fashion across the moor towards home.

Pushing up his Scotch bonnet to one side, and rubbing his hand up and down over his short, stiff hair, his questioner stood gazing after him with slow wonder, not unmixed with fear.

"Ha' ma words been the hammer to hit the richt nail on the heid!" he muttered in a voice that was choked with its horror-stricken note of pain.

But even as the murmur passed his lips he saw the retiring figure halt, hesitate a few seconds, then face round, and come slowly back again, his countenance pale, and set with a gravity almost as stern as the watcher's own. Having approached to within a few paces of the spot he had just quitted, Ivie stood still, and lifting his eyes to Blair's face he said with a new slight touch of haughtiness:

"Were I a heathen instead of a Christian, William,

I should hold the insult you have put upon me but now sufficient warrant between us for a mortal feud. But I mind that it hath been said to the followers of Christ—'Let not the sun go down upon your wrath.' And so I have returned to wish ye the Lord's blessing for the coming night, even as my uncle aye wishes those who come to him as troublesome, cruel-hearted emissaries from yon evil man, James Sharp."

Receiving no answer from his nonplussed companion, he added with a gleam of boyish irony:

"Perhaps some day ye, yourself, may have the good fortune to be sent as an emissary to the Bishop of Dunblane, and may then learn a useful lesson from one who is too noble-minded to think evil thoughts of others. I would ye might also learn from him some fair lesson, that might teach ye to forgive my mother for obeying the conscience which bids her keep friends wi' her own brother."

Having thus said what he had in his mind, to the end, Ivie again turned away, and made the best of his way home, for he had already lingered longer than usual on his road. Blair remained where he had left him for some time, rubbing away at his forehead, by way of trying to rub clearness of decision upon many points into his somewhat slow-moving mind.

But as yet no light shone for him along any path of reconciliation with those who held friendly communion with members of the Covenant-condemned prelacy. At last he put by his communings for the time, and wended his own ways to his distant abode. As he walked all the bitterness nourished by recent events returned to his thoughts, all the heaviest sternness to his brow.

"Hech!" he muttered at last, in no very careful tones: "Elspeth saith that James Sharp hath a compact wi'the Evil One. And I doobt but it is mair charitable to judge that he acts by compulsion o' his black master, than to think he gangs his ain gait in all his present wickedness, and sair harsling o' the saints o' the Lord."

Whether indignation burning so hotly within his breast made William Blair indifferent to aught else, or whether the apparent utter loneliness of the desolate moor had made him thus indulge in uttering his opinions aloud cannot be said, but it is certain that even he was no little taken aback when a man's voice from somewhere at his feet said in a tone of off-hand coolness and warning:

"My friend, do you always make use of your voice when you walk alone out of doors? If such is your ordinary practice, allow me to suggest indifferent themes for your soliloquies. I do not happen to have the distinguished honour to be one of those estimable beings who go about doing the 'harsling' work of his Grace of St. Andrews. But if I were, you see, your career of usefulness to your cause would be prematurely cut short. Permit me to remind you that thought ought to make you prude it, if no care for personal safety will do so. Good after-

noon to you now, and pray forgive my intrusion upon your outspoken meditations."

Having been so unceremoniously detained on his road, those who knew Blair most intimately would have expected that he would not have been so easily dismissed. But he recognized, or thought he recognized, in the great figure lying couched in the heather and enveloped in plaids, one to whom he considered a certain amount of deference to be due, and with a mute reverence he withdrew.

Having continued on his homeward route a hundred yards or so he whistled softly, and then called — "Wallace—Wallace—where are ye! Have ye no greeting or sign o' remembrance for yon Scotch-born Englishman, ye unmannered brute?"

But a sigh followed the unjust reproach. Poor Wallace was not at hand to hear it. He himself had given him to another. He often fell into forgetfulness of that fact. He had done so now.

"Has your step-sister been here the day?" he asked, as his wife met him on the threshold of the house.

Mary Blair shook her head. "Nay," she said with the anxiety that is ever ready to trouble those who grow accustomed to a continuous stream of adversity. "Elspeth comes not thus far but when bad news offers itself to her lips' telling. Surely for the present there is no more of that?"

"Aye, aye, plenty o' that, aye plenty o' that," returned her husband half-absently. "But Elspeth will no ha' been here then. I thought maybe she

wad so, for one is around, I doobt, wha whiles gies her messages when danger is abroad. Maybe the fancy will ha' taen him to do his warnings one whiles himself, though, if Elspeth has no been here."

"She has no been ben the hoose at any rate," said Mary decidedly. "For I ha' nane been forth all day, and she is nane so saft of foot or low of voice as to enter and I not hear her."





CHAPTER XVI.

A LATE VISITOR.

enough in Scotland, much shorter than England's favourite "twilight hour:" Ivie had laid down his pen, Mistress McCall's spinning-wheel had ceased to hum, and there came a

tap at the door.

Mother and son started, and exchanged quick, eager glances with each other. A happy brightness came into their eyes, and happy smiles to their lips. A ceaseless prayer had been in both hearts that William Blair might be brought, somehow or another, to see his way to being on terms of friendly intercourse with them again, notwithstanding Mistress McCall's continued friendship with her brother, and her reception of his benefits. And here, surely, had come the answer to the prayers. Ivie thought, with a pardonable feeling of exultation, that what he had said to him that afternoon deserved some of the credit,

The pair felt equally sure that they recognized Blair's customary quiet, deferential rap upon the panels. But from the face of his human companion Ivie's eyes fell upon the dog's, and there they learnt disappointment as quickly as they had glowed with hope.

Wallace was sitting up, with ears bent forward, and tail moving slowly and gravely to and fro on the floor. That was not the way in which Wallace would have welcomed his beloved old master. He who was outside was not a stranger to the dog, but he was not Blair.

Ivie was thoroughly assured of this, even before the door opened in obedience to his mother's eagerly uttered exclamation—" Enter, and be welcome!"

The door opened, Wallace got up, paced slowly over the floor, and laid himself down, a great bar across the doorway, which was filled almost as completely now by a living door as it had been the instant before by the wooden one. Kate McCall and Ivie also rose to their feet, the lady with a low startled cry. No, surely, whoever the late visitor might be, he was not her husband's faithful follower.

She had never but once before seen such a giant of a man; and that was in the aisle of the Old Kirk in Edinburgh, on the June day of the last year, when one, whose courtly manners and rich dress had been apparent through some attempt at disguise, had poured the fragrant essence over the headless body of the minister, James Guthrie.

But her visitor of this night bore no resemblance to

that man, to her apprehension, excepting in his size. Indeed even that seemed an exaggeration on the other; as he stood filling in the doorway, the coarse, weather-worn bonnet pulled down over his brow, and a couple of huge, rough tartans so wrapped about his face and figure that he looked little more shapeable than an animated mass of mufflers.

Whilst, however, Mistress McCall gazed at the new-comer with mingled distrust and curiosity, Ivie went forward to him with the air of welcoming a somewhat awe-inspiring acquaintance. Whether or no his mother had ever seen him before, Ivie felt sure that he had done so, and that the man who now stood looking down at him was the same individual who had so greatly startled him, with much of the same inquiring gaze, in the doorway of his mother's favourite sitting-room at Blair's Farm.

"I fulfilled your command, sir," he said with a low bend of his curly head. "My mother has it safe. Would you have it back again?"

"Have what back?—What is safe?" growled the grim-looking mountain of wraps, in a voice that he apparently knew as well how to disguise as he could disguise his person. The next moment, however, he broke into a short laugh at the boy's mystified expression, and said in full, rich tones such as greeted Ivie's ears on that past occasion:

"By my troth, my friend, you pay too high a compliment to my powers of dissimulation. Yes, you are right, we have made friends before. Still,

allow me to remind you that although I certainly have stretched out to an unconscionable length, there yet are other individuals as tall as myself in existence. Two at any rate there must be, for I am credibly informed that a short while since a man was accosted in the street by my name. 'I am not he,' was the reply. 'Then you are such an one.' But he was not such an one, but somebody else. And so you see, as has been remarked before, appearances are deceitful. And now to the business of my visit."

That such a rattle-pated chatterer could possibly have any, Mistress McCall had begun to doubt. His cultured speech having removed her first apprehensions of robbery, her mind had jumped to the scarcely more comfortable conclusion that the disguised caller was one of those English vagabond fops, abounding during the idle, pleasure-seeking reign of Charles II., and that the object of the present visit was to find amusement in ridiculing "the aborigines."

Happily she very quickly found that this supposition was also wrong. Turning from her son towards herself with a most courteous inclination, he craved permission from her to explain the purpose of his presence there.

"The politics of the present day actually affect even this peaceful home," he said with a half-sigh, "as I will endeavour to explain. The facts are these— Two great men have just been trying a fall together. In other language, trying to ruin one another; for to neither was power possessed of its required sweetness so long as the enemy was able to boast of also holding any fraction in his hands. It must be the ditch for one, and the top of the hill for the other."

Mistress McCall dropped her cheek into her hand with the sighing murmur—"Ah! James Sharp will doubtless be one of these proud adversaries. But who may the other be?"

The stranger bowed courteously. "Your pardon, lady, there is no other, if I answer you with reference to James Sharp, for he is not anywise concerned with the affair I now speak of—no, not with all his busy love of having a finger in the pie, hath he had any meddling between my—I would say between the present Lord High Commissioner, Middleton, and the one probably to come, so soon as his sense of the decorous may permit."

"Would that it might be a Covenanter!" exclaimed Ivie.

The broad white hand came down upon his shoulder with the tempered weight of a benevolent sledge-hammer. "It may be a Covenanter, my boy, for such of old hath the Earl Lauderdale boasted himself to be. But think not to reap any advantage to your beloved cause from his gaining the head seat at the Council-board. He is a Covenanter only as a second to being a Royalist, and a far-away second too."

"Very far away; too far to be seen," returned Ivie disconsolately. "I have heard at my uncle's that the

Earl was one of the first to sign the sinful declaration, affirming the very Covenants he had vowed to God to maintain even to his life's extremity, to be illegal, and not to be held as binding upon any one. He is not likely to do much towards easing the burdens laid upon the Covenanters."

The visitor looked down with increased interest at the boy's handsome face, now suffused with the burning glow of emotion. "You cannot have been old enough, my lad," he said gravely, "to learn much from thy father's teaching before he died, but methinks he had been well satisfied to acknowledge thee for his son, had he lived to watch thy growth."

The words were so spoken as that Mistress McCall caught but the last word, and taking it up with the quickness of a mother to resent any possible slight upon her bairns she hastily put in:

"Aye, sir, it is true my Ivie is not tall as some bairns are of his years. But I have been told that his father also was slow in growing, although he came to be of a fair height enough before he'd done."

The stranger smiled. "Was your husband likewise slow, dear lady, in the growth of his mind and spirit; for if so, in that I would venture to say that father and son are wide apart as the poles? It was of the growth of the intellect I speak, not of the body."

The widow blushed, and smiled also now, at the error into which she had fallen, and to relieve her

slight embarrassment he returned to the former subject.

"You are right, my boy, as to Lauderdale's late act of abjuration, but even had he let that alone he would have been nought but the rottenest of reeds for any of his former associates to lean upon. He avers openly that he counts it his greatest honour to be the King's servant, that in everything he carries himself as a servant and a faithful servant, and that in all respects he is resolved to serve His Majesty in His Majesty's own way. Scotchmen have learnt but too certainly, ere now, that serving the cause of the Covenanters will not chime in with that resolve."

"And yet," ejaculated Kate McCall, "and yet he was, himself, a twice-vowed Covenanter."

Her hearer shook his head with a half-laugh. "Ah! madain, that constrained repetition of the oaths was a first sign, was it not, and a warning note, that those who insisted upon it felt that oaths had but a small hold sometimes; else, why the need for a renewal! Our King Charles saith half in anger, half in jest, that he had enough of Covenanting in his youth to last for a long lifetime, and more than enough of preachments and reproofs in a month than would have sufficed Methuselah for his nine hundred and sixty-nine years."

"It would be the better for him were he forced to listen to some now, from the lips of those who would dare to speak the truth," said Ivie quickly, and as he finished the stranger laid his hand lightly over his mouth.

"Hush, my friend; thou'rt as hot-headedly imprudent with that tongue of thine as thy compatriot, John Welch. More than once hath he forced deception upon me to cover his uncalled-for rashness."

"You know Mr. Welch!" exclaimed Mistress McCall, in a voice of mingled surprise and pleasure, and in her excitement she again rose, and came forward towards the door. "Are you perhaps—perhaps—"

And there she hesitated, and tried to get a fuller look at him than the gathering darkness would permit her to obtain. Moreover, he drew the muffler closer up about his mouth and chin, as though to baffle the scrutiny. But even as he did so he laughed lightly once more, and replied:

"Am I, perhaps, also a minister, would you ask! Ah—ha! Pardon my laughter, madam. Indeed I crave your pardon, but by my troth there is something too droll in the association of such a suggestion with my name. Nay, nay, I am but a beggarly hanger-on of the Court, and, of the worthless, idle set to which I thus belong, perhaps I may claim the proud distinction of being the most absolutely a goodfor-naught. But, fortunately you may consider—most provokingly for peace of mind, under my especial circumstances, say I,—early in my career I fell in for a few weeks with a man who was a

Christian, not according to the easy-fitting type of the present age, but of the kind that I imagine those men may have been who were first called Christians, I think my mother told me in my babyhood, at Antioch."

"Ah!" ejaculated Kate McCall, regarding him with compassionate hope. "You had a praying mother then, I judge. That is at least well for thee. For I have ever great hopes for the sons of such."

The flippant tone had gone when the somewhat unsteady answer came: "My mother was such a woman as I take you to be. One of those who have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb, till they are white even as His own. But her heart was aching for me, I take it, when she died."

The silence which followed this was broken at last by Ivie. "But about the man?" he asked quietly. "What did the man do during those few weeks?"

"Do!" was the echo, with the former flippancy reasserting itself. "Why, he did me what seems to have been rather a bad turn, considering all things. He gave me back a wide-awake conscience. And it has most obstinately refused to go to sleep ever since. Owing to that same conscience I am afraid I cannot say that I have very materially amended my own ways; but I have occasionally spent some time, trouble, and ingenuity, in helping those whose lives accorded better with the name they bear than my own does. More than once, as I have said, it has been my fortune to be able to throw a cloud between

Mr. Welch and the long arms stretched out to make a snatch at him."

Kate McCall's hands went together in the usual close clasp that marked strong agitation of her gentle spirit. "Alas!" she murmured. "Would that you had been at hand to throw such a cloud between his enemies and that shining light of our Kirk—James Guthrie."

As she mentioned the name there was a slight sound, as though of a smothered ejaculation from the stranger. But if so his voice had been forced back into an ordinary accent, as he resumed his own speech, without apparent heed to the interruption.

"Unfortunately, the troubles between great folks, and their squabbles, of which I have been telling you, involve little folks in their consequences, and such small power to help the persecuted amongst your countrymen, as I have possessed for the past two years, has diminished almost to the vanishing-point with the downfall of Middleton."

At last, with that announcement, Mistress McCall imagined that she had gained light as to the reason of this visit which was being paid her so unexpectedly.

"Ah, I understand," she said. "You would have us convey the tidings to the minister of your inability to screen him any longer from his enemies. Is it not so?"

Again that short laugh. "If you would serve John Welch, madam, in some respects I assure you it must

be against himself. To tell him that he owed aught in the past, for the present, and possibly for the future, to such as I would be like inviting him to deliver himself up to his enemies. He is not of those who will take even such gifts as protection and life out of hands that are stained and soiled, ay, inwards to the very bone."

A silence for five seconds. Then he hastily with-drew his clasp upon Ivie's shoulder. "There, my boy," he said with some gruffness. "I crave your pardon also, for having ventured to pollute your shoulder with my touch. You good people are all too good to be able to do aught for the bad, but look down upon them with shuddering scorn and disgust. We must even do you a service in your despite."

Ivie was so taken aback by this unexpected outburst that he stood startled and silent. But it had a wholly contrary effect upon Kate McCall. Her pitiful heart was touched to the very core by a heart-wrung cry which was audible enough through the passion to her woman's ears, although it was natural enough that a boy should not recognize the sound.

Only once before in her life had she laid her hand on a stranger's arm. That was beside James Guthrie's bier, when she had prayed God's blessing on the giver of the potent perfume. Now, a second time, she laid her gentle hand upon the arm of this man standing there shrouded from her ken in the doorway.

Wallace never moved. Stretched out at full length, he lay there as a bar between them. And the man stooped low, and patted the great, sagacious head, saying with that short, quick laugh of his:

"See, even Wallace warns me that it is not for such as I am to dare to cross the thresholds of good Covenanters."

Then, as he lifted himself up again, there came that touch of the woman's sympathetic fingers upon his arm. "My friend," she began, with just a faint tremor of timidity in her voice. "My friend, did that man of whom you spoke awhile since, did he look down upon the bad with shuddering scorn and disgust?"

His eyes were fixed upon the fingers lightly resting upon his arm. "No," he replied in a low tone. "He had learnt at the feet of One who came not to heal the well but the sick, not to call the righteous but the sinners to repentance. Methinks you have learnt of the same Teacher."

"And you also," said the pleading voice; "you also will accept the gracious influence of the Holy Spirit, which is even now striving with you. And you also will learn of that loving Teacher?"

He shook himself as though he would shake himself free of his fit of gravity as he replied, with an effort at his former carelessness:

"Maybe, dear lady, maybe as the years roll on I may consider the matter."

Kate McCall's hand dropped back to her side, and

her head drooped. In answer to the mute expression of sorrow, her strange visitor continued:

"Nay, I would really make you a full promise on the subject, but an I am sure that I should break it, if I came across too many of those who remind me privately ever of one text in the Bible, and only one—'Judge not, that ye be not judged.' I have sought guidance here and there, since he I spake of died, ay, of your own Covenanting Ministers; but I have been warned off, as it were. If they uttered not the words aloud, they thought them: 'Cast not your pearls before swine.' And so, madam, that I give ye not further time to consider that you have, yourself, disobeyed the injunction by bestowing kind words on me, I will say farewell!"

With a repetition of the courteous entrance bow, he stepped back to take leave. But in the very act of turning to depart, memory flashed back upon him an important circumstance, and he returned to the doorway with a half-smile.

"That is just the way with me," he said. "I was departing with none of my errand performed. My tongue runs away at the slightest touch of the spur from the purpose I have at heart. Eighteen months and more ago a crystal perfume bottle was entrusted to this little lad here for your hands, hoping that it might some day be of service to one or both of you, if used as a reminder to him who gave it. With the fall of Middleton from power the talisman it may be—"

"Talisman!" ejaculated Kate McCall, lifting up her eyes with fear, not unmixed with the superstitious horror from which few indeed in those days were thoroughly free.

But her companion smilingly reassured her. "Nay, I used the word out of its accustomed sense. The bottle was but as a talisman to influence men, not spirits. As circumstances are now it may avail somewhat, and it may not. Should you need to try its powers, consult with old Elspeth Spence. She will be able to advise you. And so, once more, farewell."





CHAPTER XVII.

CALM BEFORE THE STORM.

ANY and many a time, as the months flowed on, did Mistress McCall and Ivie discuss their twilight visitor, as those who live quiet and retired lives in lonely country

spots do discuss the rare events of importance that break in upon the general monotony of their lives.

Time passed. Ivie still continued his studies at his uncle's, who was growing increasingly heart-sick at the course of events in his country, and the utter fruitlessness of his efforts to change their cruel and disastrous current. The Blairs still held aloof from Kate McCall. Or rather, William did. For his wife, she only did his bidding, and sighed and wept privately over the accumulations of the sorrows of her generation. Her husband had grown sterner and more silent than ever, and of late he had become cold and hard besides.

But the blame would lie on the oppressors of his country, not on him. This is what the historian

says of those drear days. The picture shows plainly enough how peaceable, affectionate subjects like William Blair got transformed into fierce haters and fanatics. So far from being persuaded to turn over to the opposing side themselves, it was utterly impossible that they could avoid thinking it the worst calamity that could befall any human being, that he should be induced, by either fair means or foul, to join himself to those who could behave so brutally.

"There was now (ever since the many Acts of 1662, you know,) a patent legislative machinery for harassment and punishment in force. To give it the more effect, military parties were sent to aid the civil authorities in the most conspicuously offending districts. The result was, what always will be the result of putting the enforcement of the civil law into the hands of the soldier—licence, oppression, and insult. In one district, a hard, rough soldier, Sir James Turner, was sent to command the troops. How terrible a curse he must have been to the people can be better understood from the dry detail of an official report than from aught else."

There was an investigation into this terrible man's conduct some years afterwards, and amongst an immense number of charges proved against him here is just one, to let you judge for yourselves what sort of justice was ever obtained at the hands of one whose duty it was to enforce laws.—" Reported by the Privy Council—He fined for whole years previous to his coming to the country."

The laws were harsh enough to beggar the whole country, but, under Sir James Turner's rule, it would be a subject of melancholy interest were it possible to find out now how many weak, and old, and sick, and how many little children, died of actual starvation, whilst Sir James Turner and his troops lived and rioted on the bread and money that should have gone to sustain their lives. But to pass that sad reflection by, and to return to the characters of our tale.

Whilst the wave of oppression was deluging wide districts with misery, Kate McCall and her son were sheltered in their fast adhesion to the Covenant by their relationship to the Bishop of Dunblane. Indeed, no one dared make it their very special business to inquire what of the Bishop's own ministrations his sister and nephew attended, or if any of them at all. Both were at the palace rather frequently, and once Kate had ventured so far to indulge herself as to be present at her brother's preaching of one of his most eloquent and Scriptural sermons. He had been quick to note her presence, and equally quick to supply her with one of the "safe-conducts" demanded in those inquisitorial times—a minister's certificate.

But, beyond increasing the indignation of William Blair, who by some means came to hear of it, the certificate had been a useless document up to the year 1666, when Ivie McCall was just fifteen years of age, and though still rather short, and younger-looking than his years, was sturdy as a Scotch boy should be, of singularly keen intelligence which had been already

well cultivated, and with the promise given, in his early boyhood, of a generous and self-reliant nature, giving signs, to those who watched his progress, of a noble fulfilment.

The mysterious donor of the Venetian flask was often in his thoughts, as he was often the subject of his conversation, as has been said at the commencement of this chapter. But the stranger had never paid another of his twilight visits to the McCalls, neither had the token he had given them been any more called for, hitherto, than the Bishop's certificate.

A day was coming when it might be otherwise. An hour was fast approaching that should try Ivie McCall, and prove what metal he was made of; whether of the gold that is purified by the refiner's fire, or the worthless dross.





CHAPTER XVIII.

A CONVENTICLE DISTURBED.

OTHER!!" The tone of the cry, rather than the word itself, brought Mistress McCall with the speed of maternal alarm from the upper regions of the house,

where she had been overlooking various stores, with the unspoken idea that there might be many of her suffering countrymen, during the coming winter, whom she and all true Covenanters would need to help to the utmost of their power, and perchance beyond it.

But hark! Again that cry "Mother!" And with a sound of agony in it, as though it burst forth from a heart so overcharged with suffering that no ught but a mother's love could comfort it.

One moment, and Kate McCall stood confronting her son. Speechless, staring at him with eyes almost as wild-looking as his own. There had but an hour passed since her last seeing him and now, and yet he was so changed that she seemed as though she scarcely knew him.

Instinctively, as it were, her hands went up covering her face, and then dropped slowly—slowly—down again, as though they expected to carry down with them, and bury out of sight, some grim dismal vision that had come so unexpectedly and cruelly to torment a gentle-natured human being.

But as the eyes were once more unveiled they met still the same blanched, drawn face that she had imagined for the brief space must be a dream.

"Mother!" came the repetition of the name at last, but in a hoarse, thick whisper now, and with a convulsive shiver that ran through his whole frame, and contorted every feature of his countenance. "Mother, they have murdered him!"

And yet anew that convulsive throe seized the boy, and threatened to deprive his limbs of power to support him. His hearer's eyes dilated with fresh horror. His breath came with heavy, laboured gasps, that almost prevented utterance.

"They have murdered him!—He was coming here for shelter—But they caught him—And I—I—stood by, and saw it done—They were men, six of them, and I only one, and a boy—"

He panted painfully for some moments, and then moaned out—"And God gave me no strength, no strength."

The despairing bewilderment of that last bitter complaint pierced his mother's heart even more than the frantic passion of his former words, and clasping him in her arm she drew him into a small, narrow

room just behind the cottage-door, at the instant that a party of soldiers turned the curve of the road that brought them within sight of the small homestead, sheltered in the hill-side nook. The comfortable little home that had been given up for a residence to the McCalls was the only building visible anywhere around, and thither accordingly, after a rapid glance at the place, the dragoons wended their steps, with faces ablaze with fury and bloodthirstiness.

Well was it for Ivie and his mother, in that terrible hour of peril, that the worthy dame had been led to seek as safe a hiding-place as any that the place could have afforded them on such terribly brief notice.

But we must go back a short time, to discover the explanation of young McCall's tragic words, and the cause of his present dangerous position, as one of those sought for by a set of men whose tempers and circumstances had deadened them to sentiments of mercy or forbearance.

It was the evening of the previous day when a little party of friends, poor people all of them, shepherds, field-labourers, and like humble folk, had met for prayer and Bible reading in the simple cottage of a sick man.

Daniel McMichael had been sought for by the King's troops for some months past, and had barely saved his life by hiding now in a cave almost below the level of the stream, now in the midst of the quaking moss, or up in some narrow cleft of the

bleak hill. But the inclement weather, and his many privations, had at last utterly broken down his bodily strength, and under the thick cover of a dense mist some of his comrades had carried the poor, fever-stricken fellow home to be nursed by his weeping wife, and to be in what comfort was possible to his aching body, at any rate until his sickness grew less sore.

"You are quite safe for a while, I am confident," said one. "For those who seek to compass your death are off the clue, I have discovered, and are hunting for you many miles from here."

And with these words of cheer he helped the bearers to convey the sufferer as a wounded bird into a trap. For he who spoke them was a Judas.

Of all hideous trades there can surely be none to equal that of the spy, even regarded from its fairest side. But when the spy is the informer to betray innocent blood, then, truly, one's very hand grows hot with horror and shame even as it writes so execrable a being's name.

With the cool, base calculation going on in his mind, of how much money he was to be paid for the betrayal of his holy-living, God-fearing neighbour, Birsy the cobbler chatted on to him of the comfort and security he was to enjoy during the coming week, and aided to place him in the exact spot whence he could most easily deliver him up to his enemies.

That very evening McMichael summoned such of his covenanted brethren as lived around to pray with him, and enjoy the mutual consolation of reading the Holy Scriptures together, with the Lord Himself for their great High Priest in the midst of them, according to His promise. This was the opportunity that the wretched Birsy had counted upon. He knew well enough that, according to the pattern of his great Jewish namesake, so with this Christian Daniel, no amount of suffering, threats, or danger, would keep him back from offering prayers and praises to the Almighty.

To deliver up the pious, obnoxious individual, under any circumstances, was to put money into the cobbler's pocket. But to deliver him up whilst actually engaged in the services of an unlawful conventicle would certainly be "one of the best paid bits of work that he had ever done," muttered the dastardly informer, as he hurried away from the unsuspecting victim's cottage, on the plea of summoning the inmates of an outlying farm to the prayer-meeting, but in reality to fly as fast as his feet—nay, rather one should say, as fast as greed—would carry him, to where the dragoons with their commander lay in temporary concealment, in order to put the Covenanters off their guard.

But rough, unruly men, actuated by no keener motive than that of huntsmen half-satiated with a day's sport, do not hide themselves away with such care but what the vigilant eyes of those who have a life and death interest in their movements may discover them.

Scarcely had Daniel McMichael opened the evening's devotions by offering up thanks from his very soul, as he lay there upon his sick-bed, for the Father's mercy in vouchsafing them the grace to love Him, than another of the hunted brethren flew breathless into the crowded kitchen. In one instant all was confusion and alarm. The face of the newcomer told his tale even before his lips found power to exclaim:

"They are upon us!—Fly!"

Who "they" were, none needed to inquire. In the midst of the turmoil there was but one of the assembly who remained tranquil. Sick, helpless, already, it might almost be said, in the hands of those who allowed short reprieve between capture and death, McMichael retained the sweet serenity for which his Christian life was so remarkable.

"As thy days thy strength shall be," he murmured quietly, as his agonized wife flung herself upon him on the bed, clasping him in her arms, as though their weak power should protect him from his foes.

With pitying resolution friends tore her away. Moments were precious. There was no time for ceremony. No time to plead with her, for her own sake and her husband's. Another courier had come in, with such tidings as proved the soldiers must have an experienced guide with them, to help them on their way so speedily. If a rescue were possible it must be made instantly.

"Save yourselves, my friends, save yourselves, I

beseech you," entreated Daniel, showing a solicitude for his companions that he did not feel for himself.

A tall muscular man of middle age, unheeding the adjuration, continued his self-imposed task of rapidly folding the blankets around the invalid's shoulders, whilst another of the party was similarly occupied in wrapping up the rest of the worn and emaciated body from the chill night air.

"Now lift him," said the latter quickly, as his part of the work was accomplished, and in a moment the man at the head of the bed had gathered the whole bundle of patient and bed-clothes into his stalwart arms, and dashed out of the cottage with the whole of the members of the small conventicle.

"Ah! leave me, I implore you, and save your-selves," once more urged McMichael.

"Love thy neighbour as thyself," said his bearer stolidly, as he marched on up the half-dry bed of the burn, carrying his burden with a speed that testified to his strength as well as to his self-denying Christianity.

The rest of the company kept in a compact body around these two, the better to shield them from observation. But at last a hurried, terrified cry, issuing from almost every mouth simultaneously proclaimed the dread fact that the pursuers were actually within sight of them. Shots were fired at them. Panic seized upon the poor creatures, and they fled in every direction before their ruthless pursuers.

But there were two of the party who could not fly,

Daniel McMichael and his bearer. One of these revengeful shots had taken effect. McMichael felt his companion stagger under his weight for the first time, and sorrowful fear taught him a true guess for the cause of it.

"Blair," he asked with a catch in his voice, "Blair, are you wounded, through your merciful thought for me?"

"I am wounded," came the answer. "But, Daniel, heed ye this, I am nane wounded through ye, mind; but through the will of the dear Lord, who doeth all things well. Maybe we'll meet at the foot o' His throne, ere the morrow's dawn breaks o'er this troublous world. May He, who is the Father o' the fatherless, watch o'er the little lad."

"Amen," murmured the sick man fervently. He had never seen the "little lad" referred to, but he knew perfectly well who it would be that his present companion would thus pray for, in the supreme hour of waiting upon death.

As the Amen was uttered the wounded Covenanter took his last tottering step onwards, and then, finding his strength quite exhausted, he laid his friend down on the heather, and sank beside him, to await the coming of the soldiery. Five minutes elapsed before their heavy, awkward feet brought them to the spot, and in the interval pain and loss of blood had sent the man who had been shot into a heavy faint.

"There's one of the pigs dead already," said a dragoon with a brutal laugh, and, bestowing a con-

temptuous kick upon the prostrate form, he turned away to the equally congenial employment of attempting by blows and blasphemy to put sufficient strength into their surviving, and most desired, captive to enable him to walk back with them to their quarters.

But neither hideous language nor savage blows could conquer the ravages which fever had made upon their prisoner's exhausted frame, and they were obliged at last to recognize the fact, and carry him as his friend had done before, meantime insulting him in every way that their malicious and rough tongues could hit upon, whilst he held his peace.

McMichael's very calmness and silence at last impressed the commander of the troopers, much as his great Master's "dumbness" had impressed the Roman Governor, more than sixteen centuries before.

"Do you not know," he demanded at last imperiously, and with a mingling of wonder and exasperation; "do you not know that your life is in my hands?"

To the jeers and scoffs and taunts and lying accusations Daniel had been as one deaf, but to the direct question he gave direct reply. There was a holy light in his eyes as he did so, and a confident, one had almost said a proud, smile on his lips.

"You ask if I know that the power over my life and death is in your hands, sir. Nay, verily, then I know not that, neither can I. This I know, and am confident of, that my life is in the Lord's hand, and if He see good He can make you the instrument to take it away."

With an oath the commander turned on his heel, and ordered the halting troopers to continue their route to the village where the prisoner should be guarded for the night.





CHAPTER XIX.

HOW McCALL DID THE DRAGOONS' BIDDING.

cMICHAEL, prepare for death, for you shall die to-morrow."

That was the commander's final goodnight to his helpless, fever-stricken prisoner, and with his doom thus pronounced upon him he enjoyed so gracious a time of communion and fellowship with God, we are told, was blessed with such comfort of joy and consolation, that the hardened vicious men who guarded him were struck to the heart, and desired to die his death, if but they might enjoy his hope.

Meanwhile the hours passed on, and with the first grey dawn of morning the troopers were astir again, conveying their condemned captive to the garrison town for execution. But the events of the preceding day had yet further weakened him, and it soon became very apparent that death would step in, without aid, to rob them prematurely of their victim if he had to endure the aggravated sufferings of a prolonged journey.

For those same sufferings the stern-hearted commander cared nought, but he felt as though he would be actually cheated in some sort of his due, if his prize should after all die what might be called a natural death.

"Swooned again," growled the dragoon who had the unenvied duty of conveying the dying Covenanter with him on his horse. "Swooned again, curse him!"

The officer caught the grumbling mutter, and turned round to his follower, questioning as to what he had said.

"The rascal has swooned again, sir," was the reply. "And faith, Captain, but I believe he'll be off the horse in another minute, and rid you of further trouble with him by getting a broken neck."

There was an instant's pause after this speech, then "Halt!" shouted the Captain, before addressing the man again to whom he had just spoken.

"Smith," he said with a sardonic smile that boded no good to the prisoner, "you are right, Smith. He shall be off the horse, and now at once. But, lest he should come by a broken neck in the descent, Flemming there shall aid you to dismount him with as much tender care as though he were a nursling prince. A broken neck got through a fainting-fit were somewhat too easy a passage from this world to the next, by my troth, for a fox who hath cost us this much trouble in the capture."

Accordingly, in a green field, low down on the mountain-side, the dragoons came to a pause in their march. The horses were tethered, and while the Commander and his men callously regaled themselves with provisions they had brought for the way, Daniel McMichael gratefully availed himself of a scoffing permission given to him to spend the brief interval in prayer.

Scarcely had he sunk feebly upon his knees, and his harsh companions flung themselves full length upon the turf, to reap the fullest advantage from this unexpected rest, than one of them sprang up again, took a dozen long strides to the edge of the brawling burn below, and returned with his fingers twisted into the curly auburn locks of a second prisoner.

"And pray whom have you there, Flemming?" demanded the Captain curtly, looking at the noble boy who met his own stern eyes so unflinchingly.

Flemming was not best pleased with his officer's tone, for he had expected high commendation for his active vigilance. He was more than half inclined to relax his hold of the bright hair as he replied sullenly:

"Who 'tis I've caught I don't know, beyond that he's a Scots youngster, and no doubt a young black-guard. But I've seen him skulking after us for five minutes past, watching as though he had some reason of his own for doing so. And so I thought just now, when I saw him off his guard, I might as well take and nab him. But of course, Captain, if—"

"Of course you have done very rightly," interrupted the officer more graciously. "Come here, my lad, and give an account of yourself. In the first place, what is your name?"

"Ivie McCall."

As this reply was given Daniel started slightly, and for a moment he lifted his bowed head from his hands with a very earnest gaze at the speaker, and for an instant the gaze was also very sad. But peace returned as swiftly as it had fled, and the pale lips murmured with a full and quiet trust:

"Nay then, how can I think to have a fear or a pang for him? He is in the dear Lord's keeping, and our God is a loving Father; He is Almighty, and He is our Brother and our Friend. Man can do nought but as He wills to permit it."

A man standing over the feeble prisoner, as guard while he prayed, remarked with incredulous wonder: "Do you mean to tell me that you still feel this certainty as to Infinite love and Almighty power of goodness, now that you are about to have halfa-dozen bullets sent into your body?"

"What a question!" he said. "It Daniel smiled. was a duty to do what might be done to preserve my life, but do you think that I am sorry to have a quick call home?"

The man shook his head, but whether in answer to the question or as a sign of awakening thoughts none but Infinite Wisdom could tell. None else had been a witness of this passing episode in the day's events, for all others were occupied with the new interest attaching to Flemming's capture.

"What did you give me as your name?" asked the officer in command with a jeering tone and raised eyebrows. "Your first name, I mean."

"My name is Ivie McCall," replied the boy with flushed cheeks, but distinctly.

His interrogator appeared to find it a pleasing pastime to annoy him, and so threw still more of a sneer into the ejaculation—"'Ivie,' i'faith! And prithee then, my fine young scamp, may I ask what it is you cling to?"

Ivie drew himself up with unconscious dignity, and folded his arms across his plaid. "Yes, sir," came the steady and prompt reply. "I cling to my faith, my country, and my honour."

An involuntary mutter of something akin to admiration passed round the circle of rough auditors; the sneer faded from the officer's lips. He too prided himself on clinging to his faith, his country, and his honour, and no doubt did so, as far as a deadened conscience and blunted sensibilities left him free to see how to do so.

"There!" he said curtly, "stand aside, cock-sparrow, for the present, until the work we have on hand is despatched. And then, seeing that you make so fine boast of clinging to your honour, we may consider it worth while to administer a soldier's oath to you, and take you with us as our guide."

"Your what!" exclaimed Ivie.

"Our guide, youngster," was the reply with a return of the sneer upon the mouth. "Our guide

to the foxes' holes that it is our present employment to unearth. You shall show us where they are, and thus help us to get rid the quicker of the vermin."

The boy's eyes literally blazed while he was being thus tauntingly addressed, and his answer burst from him before the last word was fully spoken.

"No vow dictated by you shall ever pass my lips; and for guiding you-ay, only follow me, and truly I will guide ye—guide ye to the quaking moss where ye may baith die and be likewise buried, that ye no more blacken the Lord's created world with your base and cruel presence here."

For a few moments the commander was so taken aback by the young prisoner's daring vehemence that he remained silent. It was the voice of another that bestowed rebuke for the enraged threat.

"Ivie McCall," exclaimed Daniel McMichael, in a tone of pitying and sorrowful surprise. "Ye know not me, my puir bairn, but I know ye, and it is not thus that ye have been taught, to bandy words o' savage human passion with thy fellow-men. You speech o' thine had na the Spirit of the Lord in it, nor obedience to His law which saith-' Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you.' That ye should na tak' their oaths, nor be their guide to sinful acts o' cruelty, that is well. But give not railing for railing, neither learn ye from them lessons of barbarity. Are ye hearkening to me, my bairn? Poor William Blair-"

Ivie sprang towards the kneeling man with a cry:

"Ah! say then—what of him? Why do you say 'poor?' William left me on the moor yonder yester-day at noon, he said on certain business, but of what nature he told me not, and he hath not returned to his wife as yet, I know, for I met her not long since."

"Nor is he likely to," called out a brutal soldier, "if he were the fellow who was carrying this weakling here, for my bullet did its work pretty well, I flatter myself."

"Do it as well now again, then, and at once," suddenly ordered his officer, and pointing at the same time, peremptorily, at his fever-stricken captive. The next moment half-a-dozen muskets were pointed at Daniel McMichael, and before Ivie McCall's horror-stricken intelligence had fully grasped the fact of what was taking place, the purple streams of the dead man's blood were staining the heather all around.

Drops of it had bespattered the hands of the officer. He looked at them with fastidious disgust. Then, stooping, he picked up from the ground one of his men's "Luggies," * from which the dragoon had just eaten his noonday meal, and held it toward Ivie.

"Here, youngster," he said authoritatively, "take this to yonder streamlet. Fill it, and bring it hither to me, that I may wash away the reminders that dog there has bestowed upon me as his vile parting gift."

"The lad's gone daft, as his countrymen have it," muttered one of the men to a comrade.

"Humph! looks so," was the rejoinder.

^{*} Luggie-A small wooden bason.

And truly for the minute the awful shock had bereft Ivie McCall of reason. Consciousness, from being startled into too great vividness, had collapsed into utter numbness. This was the first time he had ever seen death, and it was now surrounded by circumstances to chill many a heart, even of those to whom its aspect was familiar.

Some passing sentiment of compassion found its way into the officer's hardened heart, as his eyes rested on the boy's expression of distraught horror. He gave him a light cuff over the ears, by way of using the first means that occurred to his mind of bringing him back to his senses.

"Come, my lad," he said, "awhile ago you were bold as a lion's cub! Now you look an ye could not say 'bo' to a goose. Where has the spirit oozed to, pray? If you have never seen such a sight as yon before, you have the chance to see many in the future. We are growing tired of keeping to fines; quicker methods are to be tried, for we mean to make a clearance, root and branch, one way or another—and a bullet is the quickest—of the obstinate fools who dare to dispute the King's claim to supremacy in the Church, as well as elsewhere."

"He is the head of all things for us," he added with daring blasphemy. "And if you don't reckon him so you had better make pretence you do, or you may chance to come in for the same treatment you have just witnessed, yourself. And now, do as I bid you, take this luggie to the stream there, and fill it

with water for me. And while you are down the bank just dip your own head in, and see if you cannot wash the scare out of your brain and off your face, for I have not grown a fancy for marching with idiots in my train; neither am I furnished with a suit of motley and accompaniment of bells to fit a Court fool withal."

And so saying he thrust the wooden bowl into a passive hand, and turned his attention back again to his own soiled fingers and garments. A dragoon of kinder nature than the rest took the opportunity to mutter in a hurried aside:

"Best make haste, my lad. Sorry I caught you, but our commander is not much in the habit of giving the same order twice."

The quick, warning whisper somehow penetrated to Ivie McCall's brain in a way that the measured tones of contempt had failed to do. He raised his eyes from the slaughtered Covenanter, upon whom they had been fixed all this time, and lifted them to the soldier's face.

"'The same order twice," he echoed with a gasp, and bitterly. "No, he cannot give it twice. It would be useless. One has done his butcher's work full well."

The commander's patience, what small stock of that he ever possessed, was exhausted. He caught the words, and not relishing the epithet of "butcher," he turned sharply back, and repeated the cuff over the ears with a sounding thud this time, "Fetch the water, sir," he shouted furiously. "If you linger any longer one of my men shall flog you till he can stand over you no more."

Ivie fixed his eyes for an instant on the speaker, with a flash in them of full returning intelligence, and without a word he flew off to the burn. Arrived at the very edge he paused a moment. He was being closely watched, and he knew it. In his present state of feeling he was glad to know it.

Just as the whole troop expected to see him stoop to fill the cup, he faced round to them again with an indignant cry of defiance, raised the luggie high above his head, dashed it from him into the deepest current of the stream, and with the swiftness of a deerhound had crossed to the opposite bank himself, and was flying away from his enemies towards home.

A terrible oath accompanied the deep threat of vengeance that broke from the lips of the outwitted commander. A flitting smile which he thought he detected on one or two of his followers' countenances did not tend to lessen his wrath.

But that wild cry of "Mother!" was already sounding in the ears of Mistress McCall before the soldiers were fairly mounted, and engaged in puzzled efforts to discover any practicable path by which they could follow the fugitive.

Ivie McCall gained time for his first breathless speech with her before they came in sight of the home that sheltered him.



CHAPTER XX.

HENRY SAVILE TO THE RESCUE.

T was in obedience to the instinct common to all living creatures that Mistress McCall had drawn her son, with his overwhelming trouble, into the small dim

room. At the moment of doing it she had no thought in the matter at all. Certainly no thought of screening him from a danger which she was all unconscious threatened him.

Her ignorance was soon dispelled. The trampling of horses, the curses of their riders, the shouts of the commander, made her tremble anew. She guessed well that the tumult disturbing the peacefulness of that narrow glen was caused by those who had been engaged in the work of butchery.

"Oh! my Ivie," she whispered, "would that they had chosen any road but this to regain their own quarters!"

Ivie withdrew himself from her arm as she spoke, but only to encircle his mother with his own, as he murmured below his breath: "May God comfort you, mother dear, whatever befalls. May He strengthen you! Those men are not yet on their way back to their quarters. They are seeking me."

Never in the future, never during the whole course of her life, not even when she saw her son faint beneath the torture of the boot, did Kate McCall experience the same feeling of sick helplessness that rushed over her as Ivie told her—"They are seeking me."

The oaths and curses and cries which had sounded terrible to her before, now fell upon her ears with a new and ghastly sound. They were uttered by the voices of murderers who were thirsting for her only child's blood. A trembling fit seized her, and utterly overpowered by bodily and mental weakness she sank to the ground.

"I will go out to them," she gasped, utterly beside herself with anguished fear. "My son, I will go out to them, and pray them on my knees to spare you."

Ivie knelt down on the floor beside her, and laid his cheek against his mother's. "Pray to God, mother darling," he said in low, tender tones. "I too beseech Him, that for your sake He will spare me."

Mistress McCall strained her fingers together till the blue veins stood out upon her hands as though they would burst.

"The only son of his mother," she moaned. "The only, only son, and she was a widow. The only son; oh God, the only son."

Whether the cry was uttered in obedience to that only son's loving injunction, or whether they were merely a mechanical repetition of words that were constantly in her mind, who can say, but they had the merciful effect of restoring her to some degree of mental consciousness.

Many a lone mother has found the unspeakable comfort of that quotation; of that reminder to the Lord, that they have His own conduct as an assurance that they may trust their treasure to His compassionate care.

Meantime the troopers had dashed into the cottage through the open door, flinging down against it various small articles they had plundered from an outlying farm-building on the road.

The four small rooms and their modest contents were quickly overhauled by the rough, disorderly set. Neatly folded linen scattered hither and thither. Cups and bowls flung to the ground, that hands might get rid in the quickest way of impediments to such a search into corners as might have led people to suppose the quest was after a mouse or a tomtit's nest; certainly not after a human being requiring more than inches of space to hide in.

But the minutest investigation had been made at last, with the exception of one into that little room behind the door, which the dragoons had themselves helped to conceal, and no one was found. The stir and bustle came to a pause. There was nothing more to be done. The Commander stood biting

his lip savagely, and scowling. Then he turned fiercely on one of his men.

"Flemming, you have brought us hither on a fool's hunt. Hark ye, sirrah, I shall have my eye on ye for this. So remember. You know pretty well by this time how I keep these kind of promises."

The man did know so well that he involuntarily cowered back a step from the formidable fist that grasped a heavy riding-whip. But his cheeks flushed hotly with indignation at the same time.

"Your pardon, Captain," he replied firmly; "I did see the lad dart in here, as we mounted the brow of yonder hill. My eyes are very far-seeing, and I swear to it. But the moment I saw that casement yonder I guessed that our search here would be lost labour. The boy was no booby, as any one could judge. And he'd have e'en been a bigger one than most are, had he stayed here when he could so easily get out, and make himself almost safe from any pursuit, by being off and away into the wood up there. I began to say this on first entering, but you—"

"But he" had done then what he did now, stopped all further speech peremptorily. In the first instance, he had done it because he was in such a towering state of passion that he had no patience to listen, and now he did it because he saw he had committed an error, and did not choose to receive any further reminder of the fact. With an imperative wave of the hand he walked up to that most intensely

detestable window, as he angrily considered it, and was about to stare moodily out at the pine forest when he started back with a cry.

His men crowded up behind him, and echoed his exclamation. In both instances it was one of surprise, not in any way of alarm, but the return greeting came, notwithstanding, in the shape of a short, mocking laugh, loud and sharp, issuing from a stentorian pair of lungs, and words of fit accompaniment.

"Ah, ha! my redoubtable men of war. You know what it is to be afraid of something then, when it takes the shape of a ghost."

"And very excusable too," replied the officer in the same bantering tone, "when the ghost takes the shape of such a formidable creature as you. But what in the name of all that's marvellous brings Henry Saville, the man of fashion, the *bon vivant*, into these starveling regions of desolation?"

He who was thus addressed shrugged his shoulders. "Henry Savile is noted for his whims, I believe, as much as for those other estimable characteristics to which you refer. And for ought else—starveling regions are a fine cure for dyspepsia, and mountain air sends one back with a magnificent appetite to the enjoyment of the dainties of Whitehall."

"Dainties indeed!" echoed the soldier contemptuously. "Give me a couple of long thick slices off a juicy surloin, and a straw, say I, for all your frothy dainties which leave a man's good, solid appetite as craving as they found it. I'd as soon dine off dainties as I would spend my days in wild goose chases such as I have just been cheated with in coming here."

At that concluding sentence the new-comer's careless smiles instantly gave place to an expression of determined gravity—"Ah!" he said, "you remind me, Turner. My purpose in coming up to this window was to ask you what you and your men are doing in this particular abode, and what is the meaning of all the confusion and destruction that has been wrought in it?"

The officer drew himself up stiffly for a few seconds, and compressed his lips. He had been little accustomed to be so challenged during the past two years of his lawless reign of tyranny, and his inclination was to resent the question with insolence, or a scornful silence. But—

That great giant of a fellow continued to gaze fixedly in upon him through the window with a pair of brilliant eyes that seemed to have been made without eyelids. From the view outside he took a furtive glance at the view within. His men were looking on with undisguised interest. They feared their officer, but they were hardly likely to love one whose chosen mode of rule was by brute force and terrorism. He had no reason to expect them to consider it any part of their duty to interfere in an affair between their superiors. And then bullies always have a patch of cowardice somewhere about them, to be found by knowing eyes, however cleverly it is hidden out of sight.

That most hideous pet bull-dog of James the Second's, Judge Jeffreys, for all his roarings and bellowings, and thunder-cloud scowls, was an arrant, abject craven.

The commander of dragoons shifted his foot uneasily beneath that unblinking gaze, and at the end of the short pause had apparently come to the wise conclusion that he had better answer his questioner, and civilly into the bargain. Middleton had had a present downfall truly, but he was by no means a broken-spirited individual, and as for Middleton's young cousin, he always contrived to be personally popular with men of all parties in the State. He never pretended to have any particular opinions on any of the agitating questions of the generation he lived in. He was good-humoured, ready to do a kind action for most people, and was one of those individuals who somehow go through life winning friends and influence no one in the world can explain how, and themselves least of all.

Henry Savile repeated his question, "What are you doing here?" and he received a plain answer, with only a flavour of surliness in the tone by way of betraying its reluctance.

"Well, Savile, I was not aware that you had been appointed General-Commander-in-Chief of the British army, but of course I have been long enough out of England to be ignorant of many things; and since you ask in a voice of authority I suppose I must dutifully reply."

"Ah, to be sure," was the cool reply, fortified with an equally cool smile. "But pray don't hurry yourself. I've lots of leisure time hanging idle on my hands."

"We came here to hunt for a scoundrelly young rat, and I daresay by dawdling the minutes away talking to you we have given the impudent rascal time to escape."

Henry Savile stooped his tall head forward till he brought it on a close level with his companion's. "It is very much to be hoped, for your own sake, Turner, —mind, for your own sake—that you have. And I give you a word of friendly counsel besides. You will do well to leave as little trace behind you of your unmannerly presence here as possible. This cottage belongs to the Bishop of Dunblane, and the inmates are his near relatives. I leave you to judge what sort of thanks you are likely to get for injuring and harassing one who has gained a strong claim upon the King by being converted to his will."





CHAPTER XXI.

IN THE BLAIRS' KITCHEN.

for that insolent young blackguard, his relative. And the day shall yet come when the rascal shall pay not only the

debt for his own impertinence, in daring to brave me, but the little debt due for his champion besides."

Sir John Turner was riding back to his quarters at the head of his small company. Half-an-hour since he had bid farewell to the littered cottage and its unexpected guardian, but the thirty minutes of tranquillity had served to increase his smouldering wrath instead of to allay it.

Henry Savile knew the soldier's nature well enough to guess that such would probably be the case, and he framed his warnings accordingly, to those whom he had taken under his charge. As soon as the troopers had left the neighbourhood he also drew away into the resting-place from which their shouts and uproar had led him so opportunely to emerge. But as soon

as night fell he returned, enveloped as on his former visits in the plaids with which he shrouded himself from the McCalls' scrutiny.

"It may be safer for me, in certain quite possible events," he explained that night, "that you should not be able to swear to my identity, and better also for yourselves. Otherwise, believe me, there are none I would sooner claim for intimate friends than you, for your own sakes, and on account of certain circumstances connected with former days."

He said no more on the subject, and the two he addressed were possessed of too true a politeness to press him with questions. Besides, it may well be that their hearts were too full of personal matters that day to be very keenly alive to other more remote interests. Mistress McCall's gratitude to God for having rescued her son out of the hands of the dragoons, and herself from a broken heart, overpowered everything else. She could scarcely even pay much heed to the earnest recommendations of the unknown friend, that she and Ivie should be very careful to avoid whatever could give the law any handle against them for as long, at any rate, as the present officer held sway in that district.

"He is vindictive and unscrupulous," said Henry Savile warningly, "and knows not how to forgive any offence against himself. Even your near neighbourhood to a relative in authority will prove but a small shield for you, if you permit him to find but an inch of legal ground to start from in oppressing you."

Ivie looked up quickly—" Why then—" he began.

He was about to say—"Why then, under those circumstances he had better have been allowed to get at me to-day, after all, and have done with it; for our whole present lives give him a handle against us." But in mercy to his mother he checked his declaration half-way. They had at any rate been delivered out of the enemy's power once, they might be again, and meantime, "sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

The evil of that especial day had fallen not only upon the McCalls. It had visited other homes with a far heavier weight of affliction. In the home of the slaughtered Daniel MacMichael a weeping wife sat rocking the cradle of her infant and clasping to her bosom the shattered head of her dead husband. In the morning pitying neighbours had been praying with him around his bed; at night they brought back the mangled body stealthily, that his widow might have the mournful satisfaction of a last look at all the enemy had spared.

Out on the wild, dark moor a wife knelt with dry, burning eyes, trying with the desperation of a fastgrowing despair to discover whether that morning's tragic work had made her too a widow.

Nearly twenty-four hours William Blair had been lying where he had fallen beneath his friend, before Mary Blair's anxious wanderings brought her at last to the spot, where he lay stretched out stiff and cold upon turf sodden and dyed with his blood.

With an agonized cry she had caught sight of the beloved, death-pale face, and cast herself beside her husband, pressing her lips to his. To the lips of a dead man, she had supposed. But she had scarcely touched them when she drew back with a low cry of hope, and fastened her eyes more earnestly upon the white face lying so motionless upon the ground.

The lips were pale and stiff, it was true, but not with the coldness and rigidity of death. A closer inspection showed her that he must at least have had some period of consciousness since receiving the wound, for a strip of his tartan had been torn off, and bound in some weak fashion as a ligature around his leg. This was enough. There might still remain some flicker of the flame of life, and if so, however faint it was, she would set herself to fan it back into a full glow.

She forgot herself, even it might almost be said that she forgot her love for a time, in her love's work, until hope of success had risen and fallen so often that at last despair threatened to gain the upper hand for once, and finally.

But even as her strength was failing the blessing came. There had been a sound—at least she thought so—a low sound of breathing. Perhaps some animal might be in among the gorse-bushes watching her, and it was the breath of that she had heard. She had been disappointed so frequently that she was actually afraid to let herself believe now what she was even sure of.

The sound of low breathing entered her ears again, and then, some seconds later, inexpressible joy and a momentary pang of disappointment flooded her heart together. A voice, which she could not ascribe to any wild creature in the bushes, murmured faintly with yet closed eyes:

"Maister Ivie—I knew that ye'd find me, Maister Ivie, before that ye'd gie o'er seeking me."

Never mind. Mary Blair bent softly to kiss his forehead, with tear-filled eyes. She had borne many little stings of that sort before, like other women, and she gulped it down, like a pill, smothered in a small sob, and so got rid of it.

"Dear Maister Ivie was oot seeking ye the morn, dear heart," she said gently. "But it is I;" with a tiny thrill of exultation in the loving voice, "it is I, your ain wife Mary, that ha' been the first to find ye. And—and—to bring ye back to your senses, wi' the grace of God."

And with that the overcharged spirit broke down for a short space, and laying her head beside her husband's she wept for some minutes unrestrainedly. All things considered, it may have been the best thing that she could have done just then. It relieved the strong tension to which she had been subjecting herself, and the audible expression of her feelings helped greatly towards William Blair's restoration.

He made more effort to rouse himself when he became aware of another's claim upon his attention, and in no long time after, the wound in his leg tightly strapped, and his arm laid around Mary's shoulders for support to his feebleness, the man who but the previous day had been carrying poor Daniel from his pursuers tottered slowly, and with many halts, to his home. The simple home of a simple farmer, who had asked nothing of his rulers but to be left free to continue to respect them, and to worship God according to the form which he had been taught to consider most consistent with righteousness and a good judgment.

This was all changed now. As he crawled back with pain and difficulty to Blair's Farm the Covenanter told his tale to his wife; and with each word he uttered the truth was more deeply borne in upon her that he was no longer a peace-loving, law-abiding man. Even where the laws might not touch his faith, they had become to him henceforth representatives of tyranny, and their framers tyrants, to be resisted to the death, force against force, sword measured against those that had been drawn to slay the innocent.

It was too evident that Mary Blair would have been spared many a future terror and heavy heartpang, had her husband died that night quietly out upon the moor.

As long as it was possible, while he was laid up helpless and completely prostrate with weakness and his wounded leg, his wife kept him in ignorance of Daniel McMichael's fate, and of the onslaught on the home of the McCalls, dreading the probable increase

of his brooding wrath. But there were others as eager to feed it as she was to allay it.

Daniel's brother—wild-natured, tempestuous James MacMichael—had been fined heavily and unjustly at the very outset of the infliction of these sorely-felt punishments. He had been fined for what he had done, and fined for what he had not done; fined for attending a conventicle, and fined for not attending his parish church at a time when it was actually shut up, and with no curate appointed to its charge. He had been fined for one of his married daughters who had taken her child to be baptized by an "outed" minister, and he had been taxed to pay for the keep of soldiers who were already quartered upon himself.

At last the fines had accomplished their natural work. He had been a clever farmer and an industrious man; but industry and cleverness were being exercised to feed a set of great, rough, hulking barbarians, who nourished their strength only to hunt down and harass his countrymen. He lost his ability, or forsook it. He flung away industry. The little farm fell into decay. His wife died of slow privation and weary-heartedness; and he took to wandering up and down the countryside moody-mouthed, sulleneyed, reminding each and all ceaselessly whom he came across, of the many wrongs they were suffering at the hands of those who bore rule over them.

Nature had well fitted him for a demagogue, but he would happily have missed his miserable vocation had

not a blind, obstinate foolishness on the part of others forced him to step into it.

This was the man who walked into the cottage at Blair's Farm one day, when William Blair was fast advancing towards convalescence, and his wife was down the field milking the cows. There is no need to tell you that by the time she re-entered the house-place, an hour hence, her husband knew every single particular, narrated with a strong, underlined emphasis, that could help to heat his hate and indignation to the boiling-point.

"And ye no to tell me onything anent Maister Ivie, neither!" he exclaimed, venting a share of his excited passion upon his wife as she approached his chair.

She glanced round reproachfully at the guest. But the action was thrown away upon him. It would have slid off from him without taking any effect even had he seen it, but he sat with his head bowed, his eyes bent upon the ground, wrapped away from the present altogether in bitter thoughts of the past, and thirsting longings for a revenge to be reaped in the future.

He had said his say, he had secured an ally for the coming conflict worth any two of those who had already engaged to be led by him in such a course as he might deem it right to pursue, and for the time friendly looks or their reverse were alike wasted upon him. He had a weighty matter on hand—the maturing of his plans. However, what he paid no heed to, Blair was quick enough to take note of, and he continued his rough speech to the wife whom he had hitherto treated with an unvarying tenderness and respect. She looked with anxious solicitude at the fever-spots on his pale cheeks, and the fever-glitter in his eyes, and contented herself with the one patient answer:

"Maister Ivie bid me tell ye naught."

Hoping to check a further outburst, she added: "And, as ye see, he telled ye naught himsel'. Had he wished ye to know the ower sad tale, could he no ha' telled it ye himsel', think ye, gude mon?"

But William was in a frame of mind when no plea his wife could advance would have had power to soothe him. He beat his crutch angrily upon the floor.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "Will ye no haud your tongue? You could haud it still enough when it suld ha' wagged; can ye no haud it silent now? Or will ye to show that ye are of kind as weel's o' kin to Elspeth! Joost to think o' ye pitting up o' Maister Ivie's own silence upo' the matter as a reason for yours! Was the bairn aye wont to blaw his ain trumpet, can ye daur to say? And had he told the tale, ony fule body maun see that is joost what he had been compelled to, an' he would ha' telt no lee."

He paused a moment, pushing the thick masses of red hair up off his hot forehead, and then he rose to his feet, with the exclamation: "Ah! after that a mon maun have some o' the fresh air o' heaven to blow awa' the atmosphere o' deceit."

And so saying he strode hastily out into the sharp November wind, and had gone across the yard and half over the field before poor Mary's blinding tears had allowed her to see that he had left his crutch behind him. Picking it up with a cry of astonishment, and apprehension lest he should fall for want of support, she hastened after him.

"Your crutch, my William," she cried breathlessly.

"Ye ha' gone wi'oot your crutch," and she held it to him as she spoke. But he pushed it hurriedly aside.

"I want nae mair crutches," he said shortly. "Tak' it ben the hoose again, and yoursel' too. The wind blaws cauld, and your heid's bare."

Again the tears started to the wife's eyes at that touch of remembered care for her, but she dared venture upon no remonstrance that the wind was also over chill and damp for an invalid. With a deep sigh she returned to the cottage, and laid the discarded crutch aside in a corner, more than half sorry in her secret heart that it was no more required.

While her husband was helpless without that support, there was little possibility of even James Mac-Michael being able to draw him into any self-sought fresh calamity. But now even the prostrating weakness appeared to have given way before the supreme force of will. Occupied with her own thoughts she had become as oblivious of her guest's presence as he

had throughout been of hers, but a slight incident recalled both of them to their surroundings.

Dim-sighted with weeping, and the dulness of the November day, Mary Blair had placed the crutch unsteadily, and as she moved about the room preparing the midday meal, the vibration of the floor made it fall with a clatter to the ground, bringing down a pistol with it in its tumble, that had been lying on a ledge close by.

The pistol had been loaded, and it went off with a loud report. Mary Blair echoed the sound with a loud scream, for her usually calm nerves were disturbed now, and overwrought with nursing and the multiplied sorrows and anxieties of the times.

James MacMichael was aroused at length from his long dark musing fit. He lifted his great shaggy head, dropped his huge hands, and sprang to his feet with a crystrong enough to drown all other sounds in the place.

"Firearms!" he shouted. "Who is using them? What poor innocent fellow-creature have the assassins murdered now?"

He looked like one distraught, and his companion shrank away from him in terror She had discovered the causelessness of her former fright, but here was a real reason, it seemed, for alarm; and she moved thankfully to her husband's side as he entered his home, questioning by words and looks as to the reason of the startling sounds that had so unexpectedly summoned him back.

His own fears had naturally pointed, like his friend's

dreaming thoughts, to fresh black doings on the part of the law-appointed, law-protected, most lawless marauders. Only twenty minutes ago he had stepped out of a comfortable, neat, orderly little home, and he had not been five hundred yards away from it in the interval. But it was quite within the bounds of possibility that he was returning to find nothing but desolation and a heap of ruins. Such things had been many a time during the past three years, and he, himself, was to have bitter experience that such things could be again, in a day not far distant in the future. He breathed a prayer of thanksgiving when he saw the cottage still stood intact, and found all within as he had left it just now.

"But who has been firing off my pistol?" he asked wonderingly, turning first to his friend, then to his wife for explanation.

"The crutch knocked it from the shelf, and it went off of itself," was Mary's straightforward answer.

"It was a sign to ye that an idle weapon is a useless one," said James MacMichael, with an awed solemnity that bespoke himself, at any rate, convinced of the truth of his declaration.

He came forward and stood before the pair, looking down upon them. He was of a height and size as commanding as that of Henry Savile, and in disguise they might have been mistaken for each other, had Savile chosen that his graceful stature should imitate the stoop of the round shoulders of his inferior in the social scale. He had beguiled the heavy *ennui* of an

idle half-hour in London by doing so one day, before the glass, in presence of his friend, Bernard.

"What, in the name of all the madmen who ever made themselves ridiculous, are you up to now?" cried the young Frenchman.

"Aping the attitude of a magnificent specimen of a Northern bear, I happened once to come across during my many journeyings, that is all, my dearly belovéd Bernard. I hope I amuse you?"

"Ah! vraiment, greatly," yawned Bernard. "I will even say, in compliment to you and your monster bear — Enormément. But — cela suffice — is it not? That is enough. Sit now rather and talk. When will they make an end to rid that Northern bit of your country of its two-legged bears, that I and you, and other people who likewise, as ourselves, deserve well of the world for our nobly advanced civilization, may parcel out their lands between us?"

He had no need to proffer a second request that the bear mimicry might be brought to a close. It ceased as suddenly as though the bear and the imitator had both been simultaneously killed by one of those marvellous shots that Bret Harte's heroes are so skilful in.

The finely-shaped white great hands came down upon the small daintily-formed Frenchman. He might as well have tried to move beneath them as beneath the paws of a full-grown lion.

"Bernard, my dear friend," began that finely-curved mouth above him.

Monsieur Bernard felt as if a piece of ice had been

unexpectedly inserted between his teeth. He tried to smile, but something that looked much more like a half-frightened grin of pain was the only result. His companion went on:

"My dear Bernard, there is a foolish idea in some folk's silly minds, that it is a natural law of the universe that whatever outward seeming there may be, an Englishman's unconquerable and constant inclination is to fly at a Frenchman's throat whenever he sees one, and fasten upon it like a mad dog. That is nonsense, you know. Look at you and me, for instance. Why nothing more sweet and delightful can be witnessed than our intercourse. Two brothers! Tender towards each other as two sixteen-year-old maidens. Is it not so, my most belovéd Bernard?"

The most belovéd Bernard tried to ease his aching shoulder by shifting the burden resting there an inch or two, but the "tender" clasp in which it was held was so peculiarly tight that the effort only increased the pain instead of relieving it. His mind indulged in a passing reflection that if he had only been true to his exquisite taste in the fitness of things, the harmonies of colours, of furniture, of dress, of language and deportment, he would never have been in this disagreeable position.

It was *vraiment* ridicule, he had often thought, to see him, so small and elegant, perpetually beside the broad-shouldered giant. It was not in good taste at all. Meantime the broad-shouldered giant went on with his speech:

"Yes, my small, dear Bernard, I am really very fond of you, and so I am going to confide an opinion or two of mine to your ears. You may be charitable enough to impart them to others, if you think they seem to stand any chance of requiring a warning word. My first opinion is, that the present page of our history, moral and political, is being written with so many blots that not the fires of a dozen of your purgatories would suffice to burn them out. And my second opinion is, that any one who ventures to make a jest to me, of conduct that is disgracing my country, will run a pretty strong risk of feeling my resentment for some few hours, at least, after the words are uttered."

It was quite certain that unfortunate Bernard did. His shoulders felt as if they were afflicted with a sharp attack of rheumatism for days after his incautiously-expressed wish for an estate in Scotland. It was fortunate for Henry Savile that the Frenchman was not of a spiteful disposition. But he would have received precisely the same treatment on that occasion even if Savile had known that he was.

But we must return now to the cottage-kitchen of Blair's Farm, from which I might say we have been too long absent, had not the digression grown naturally out of the description of one of the inmates there.

The group in that simple kitchen was a striking one, although the three members composing it were humble unlettered folks, regarded by their Southern brethren as scarcely a step removed from wild barbarians.



CHAPTER XXII.

ROUSED AT LAST.

" was a sign to ye, that an idle weapon is a useless one," said James MacMichael, as he came and stood before William Blair and his shrinking wife. "It was a sign to

ye that the time is come for the blood o' the Lord's saints to be avenged."

He paused to take full note of his hearers' attention ere he proceeded: "Think ye that it will be the Lord's will that such ane one as my brother Daniel, ane mon that was upright in all his dealings, holy in all his ways; think ye that the Lord wills that he should be slain wi' the Lord's book in 's hand, the Lord's praises on his lips, and no note be taken o' it? What saith the Lawgiver in his song o' inspiration—'Rejoice, O ye nations, with his people; for he will avenge the blood of his servants, and will render vengeance to his adversaries.' What saith the Psalmist—'Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered; let them also that hate him flee before him. As smoke is driven away, so drive them away:

as wax melteth before the fire, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God!' Ay! an' there is the answer besides, that cooms to follow the prayer."

And as he shouted out the words in a wild tone of exultation the brown of his pupils seemed, to Mary Blair's fascinated gaze, to turn to a lurid red. She shuddered again at his eager acceptance of the solemn and awful threat:

"The Lord said, 'I will bring my people again from the depths of the sea, that thy foot may be dipped in the blood of thine enemies, and the tongue of thy dogs in the same.'"

And then, becoming conscious of the scared look on the face of his female companion, he decided, whether moved by pity, policy, or contempt it would be hard to determine, to continue the discussion out of her hearing.

By a swift movement he turned over to the other side of William Blair, linked his hand in his arm, and had drawn him forth from the sheltering roof once more, and from the waiting meal, before Mary was thoroughly aware of his manœuvre.

Poor creature! It was trying enough to her to have to listen to the urgings brought to bear upon her husband, to run into yet greater dangers than his steady adherence to the Covenant entailed upon him every hour of his life. But she found it still harder to stand there, watching the two men from the window, and hearing nought that passed between them.

At last they came slowly in-doors again, and she caught her husband's last words on entering:

"It is settled then. You let me know to-morrow night when our Western brethren expect to be here, on their road towards Edinburgh, and I shall prepare at once to join you."

Obeying an irresistible impulse Mary darted forward and threw her arms about him, as though by force to hold him back from the purposed enterprise. For a moment her husband's face softened, and he kissed her hair, cheeks, forehead, folding her to his breast, as closely as she had clasped him. But it was for the moment only. With a stamp of the foot, as though to remind himself that the present was no time for weakness, he loosened his hold, and almost roughly pushed the clinging woman away.

"Mary," he said sternly, "verily I am ashamed for thee! This is nane the way thou and I saw Mistress McCall send forth her husband for the Cause lang syne."

"Sent him forth to his death," murmured Mary in a voice choked with sobs, but her husband went on unheeding.

"She was but a bit girl then, nane but joost ower her twenty years, and she bade him be gone to the battle wi' a smile on her face to cheer him to his duty. She might ha' been pardoned for willing to haud him, for she was young, but thou and I grow auld—"

"Hech then, stop, for I winna listen to thee,"

exclaimed Mary at this point, the flush of indignation doing battle with the paleness of her grief. "What has age to do wi' luve, mon? If it has aught for thee it has nought for me, so come ben the table and say thy grace, and eat, and coom to a better mind. The vengeance o' the Lord will truly be poured oot upo' those wha ha' turned sweet into sour in our land. But He needs na' thy hand to hold the vials o' His wrath."

But a woman is but a woman, however clear-headed and right-minded she may be. And she is very much a woman indeed, so to say, and only a woman, in men's estimation, when her opinion is not altogether moulded upon theirs. "Weak-minded, poor thing, can't grasp the matter, you know, that's it." Otherwise of course, if she were only clever enough to understand, her opinion must necessarily be the same as her superior's to a hair's-breadth.

But when her opinion is diametrically opposed to the men's? When what? When she sets up one of her own?—Oh there, drop such an absurd discussion. We are sick of it. When she does that, and attempts to argue for her opinion, it just proves that she is an idiot, poor thing, and what good can be done to any one by discussing idiots.

William Blair and James MacMichael did not say all this, of course. Indeed it must be confessed that Blair did not quite think it all, but then MacMichael did, and at the present juncture his was the ruling mind,

Three days later there was a sort of rabble army collected, marching along to Edinburgh, gathering as it marched, till some say that at one time the insurrection of 1666 counted its adherents by thousands. Rebel thousands they were called then, but, if you have read straight on to the present page of this tale, you have discovered that they as much deserved to be called rebels as your faithful dog would deserve such a name, if he continued to bark in defence of your goods and chattels according to long teaching, even though you took to kicking, beating, and starving him, and at last he sat up and howled a remonstrance against your barbarous injustice.

I saw a drunken mother beat her child the other day for crying because, in one of her stumbles, she had knocked it into the gutter, and she addressed it as, "You rebel, you!"

In Charles the Second's reign there were a good many drunken men, whatever condition the women may have been in. The year 1666, you remember, was the year of the great fire of London. That fire is said to have been lighted by a sugar-baker in the first instance, and it probably sweetened air that had grown foul with the plague. But the fire that spread from the west of Scotland to the Pentland Hills was set burning by a vinegar distillery of oppression which had overrun the country, and had soured every one it touched.



CHAPTER XXIII.

TURNING THE TABLES.

was a thing to be done upon which all the first small collected body of insurgents were equally intent. They would get at the root of the evil tree very soon, if possible, but before anything else was attempted there was a particularly obnoxious branch to be got rid of.

Upon this point William Blair and James Mac-Michael in particular were most resolute, although MacMichael's wishes went further in vindictive hate than Blair's. It was MacMichael's reverend brother who had been killed by the tyrant, Sir James Turner, and according to his present views it was an actual duty to slay one who had wilfully slain a saint of the Lord.

But it was well enough to say—"Let us first of all seize the savage commander."

How were they going to do it, became the question. For he was a commander, and of a set

of well-disciplined men too, and still more, well-armed ones besides, whilst these amateur soldiers were many of them without weapons at all. However, at the outset favour seemed to attend their purpose. They fell in with a small detachment of twelve of the hated fine-collectors, and being of sufficient numbers already to overpower them, they bound them, despoiled them of their swords and pistols, and shared the eagerly-desired spoil between them.

"But for yourself, MacMichael," said one of the party to him, as he handed the arms around; "you have kept nought for yourself, mon, and braw as your ain arm o' flesh may be, it will no reach sae far, nor fear the enemy sae much, as a pistol wi' a bullet rammed inside."

"Maybe so," was the answer, with a pair of frowning brows bent upon the speaker. "But ye need na' fash yoursel' for me; I gae not empty-handed to the frae."

And with the words he stepped behind some bushes close by, and returned to his astonished comrades with an implement of warfare as novel as it was formidable, if wielded by such a Hercules as its present owner. He looked around at the circle of wondering faces, and then back at his tremendous weapon with a sinister smile.

"Ay," * he said in ominous tones, "I admit,

^{*} From facts noted in 'Gleanings from the Mountains,' by the Rev. R. Simpson, of Sanquhar.

Donald, that a pistol-bullet may carry further, but I would recommend them that are no yet tired o' their lives to keep a few yards aff frae me and my Galloway flail, when I once begin to swirl it around my heid."

A low but universal murmur of assent showed that all who composed that group could appreciate the recommendation. The handstaff of the flail was at least five feet in length, and made of the stout tough ash-wood. The "soople," that part which strikes the barn-floor, was of iron, about three feet long, and made with three joints. It was indeed a deadly weapon if wielded by an arm well skilled in its use, and muscular.

By means of the iron joints of the "soople" it was fitted like a thong to enfold the body of a man, and to crush his ribs after the manner of a boaconstrictor! No swordsman could cope with any chance of success against an assailant armed with this Galloway flail.

"Ye did weel to keep that for your ain share," said the man who had first spoken on the matter; "you ha' made a choice that proves ye no blate, James."

The touch of envious admiration in his voice went a long way to prove his opinion, at any rate, of its superlative merits for present purposes. But when MacMichael reluctantly offered to resign it in his favour he shook his head.

"Na, na, James, haud to it yoursel', mon, ye were ay the best at its use in your ain threshing-floor, and I doobt na ye'll be so in the threshing-floor o' the Lord."

"Amen," muttered MacMichael with stern gravity, and it was with a no less reverent gravity that the words had been spoken to which he thus gave assent. In these people's own ideas they were fulfilling a strict duty, as I have already reminded you, in undertaking this expedition to rid their land of its oppressors.

Being now fairly equipped with the needful weapons of war, the insurgents made no further delay in proceeding to the execution of the first portion of the plan agreed upon between them. Speed in whatever they did was one of the chief essentials to success, for they were surrounded by spies on every side. The more worthless amongst their own numbers, even, were perpetually being bribed to betray their neighbours and acquaintances. It was almost a marvel that no one contrived to win gold and goodwill from Sir James Turner by letting him know of the threatened danger in time to make his escape.

It may have been that the unjust steward of the hard laws was too much feared, hated, and distrusted, for even spies to put faith in his promises of reward for information. But however it was, the Covenanters were there before he had settled upon any mode of defence, or had even contrived to arrange for what is said to be yet better than presence of mind sometimes, namely, absence of body.

The first intimation of the business on hand was rather startling. Flemming presented himself before his commander.

[&]quot;If you please, Captain-"

A tremendous scowl and a volley of abuse stopped his mouth before he could get any further. The truth was the Captain was filling his own mouth just at the minute with his early dinner, of precisely such juicy slices of prime sirloin of beef as he had told Henry Savile were the edibles most to his taste; and he had no wish to hear any news that should interrupt his half-hour's enjoyment.

But as the Covenanters were not particularly acquainted with the English officer's dinner-hour, and might not have been disposed to treat it with much regard if they had been, they came tearing along, a body of men, gaunt, stern, eager, with a merciful forbearance deep down in their hearts for even their most cruel enemies, which Sir James Turner would have been wholly unable to comprehend. But the fierce looks and wild gestures, which were visible on the surface, were a book for the dullest capacity to be able to read, if not altogether to understand.

Flemming had had more than enough rebuffs of late for his temper to bear very well. He had ridden in from a reconnoitring errand as fast as a fleet horse aided by the spur could bring him. But after being sworn at for appearing in the presence of his superior officer without a summons, and at an unwelcome moment, he closed his lips in a sullen silence, and registered a private vow that he would henceforth thwart him in everything that offered a safe opportunity.

Meanwhile a second messenger dashed without ceremony into the presence of the diner, and with such disorder in his manner and haste in his looks that the officer began to believe there might be something of more importance to be attended to, perhaps, than his dinner, and the second outburst of fierce words died away, almost before the first had been uttered, into a comparatively mild demand to know what was happening.

Flemming would have given him a sensible answer, the other frightened creature only gasped out: "They'll tear us limb from limb! You'll see, sir, they'll tear us limb from limb."

Sir James Turner seized his drinking-flagon, and flung it at the man. "Fool! Idiot!—I'll do it myself if you don't speak out. What 'they' are you gibbering about?"

"An immense, well-armed body of sturdy Covenanters," put in Flemming, calmly. "They were nearly here when I came to you five minutes since. They appear to be wrought up to a pitch capable of any enormities."

For his own part he scarcely believed that last statement, but it was a glorious pin's-head of revenge to see the autocratic officer actually show signs of apprehension. Flemming was quite willing, for that gratification, to have the half-emptied plate dashed at his head, with a second edition of impious threats, for not having told his news sooner.

Perhaps some glimmering idea of the real state of

the case dawned upon Sir James's mind at last, for having satisfied his unreasonable passion with this violent ebullition, he hastily composed his countenance to a more decent aspect, and condescended to attempt a hurried consultation with his sagacious follower as to what steps prudence suggested should be taken in the present unforeseen emergency.

But there was no time now for councils. The antagonists were upon them, and as the dragoons dashed forth to stem the oncoming torrent they were met by the foremost of the insurgents—the man they had wounded while he was engaged in an act of mercy, and the brother of the man they had unlawfully killed.

"Shoot the dogs down!" shouted the dragoon officer.

All very well to shout that. The "dogs" were already shoulder to shoulder with them, wrenching the muskets from their hands, flinging themselves and their arms together with a resounding thud to the ground, whilst that awful-looking James MacMichael was cleaving a way for himself, with his equally awful-looking weapon, to where Sir James stood, surrounded by a group of his men who were attempting, for how our's sake rather than affection, to shield him from the enemy.

Dash, crash, came the ponderous flail as the giant arm whirled it around the head, bringing it down hither and thither for yards around with terrific force, well-nigh tearing an arm from a socket in one direction, the iron joints of the soople cracking down the next instant upon a leg that cracked in ominous answer, as the owner fell with a shriek of agony. Round the body of another, crushing out the breath with a final gasp, protruding tongue and starting eyeballs telling of the terrible death of strangulation.

And all the wild moments as they passed marked by a shower of bullets aimed at the haggard, lowering-browed wielder of the deadly weapon, and all to no purpose. On, step by step, moved the giant Covenanter wholly uninjured. Ceaselessly, swiftly, as though worked by some monster machine rather than by a human arm, the wide-reaching flail cleared the way of all obstacles.

Matchlocks clicked. There was the spark, the smoke, but some began at last to believe that by some magical interference their bullets must be transformed into air. Unless, indeed, the giant body opposite absorbed them harmlessly, being no mortal, but a spirit fighting on the side of the Covenanters.

That notion, communicated from one to the other by the free-masonry of looks almost as much as by rapidly-breathed words, completed the panic.

"No use trying to stand up against demons or angels," ejaculated a dragoon, as he set the example of throwing away his arms, and then turned to fly, as he had many a time of late helped to make whole troops of poor innocent, helpless creatures, old men, weak women, and little children fly, from their ransacked homes and trodden fields and despoiled barns,

to any wretched shelter the mountains and moors could give.

But in the present instance it was no use to attempt to fly. The insurgents were too many and too determined to allow any of this especial well-known body of dragoons to escape.

"Fetch him back," exclaimed MacMichael, perceiving the attempt at retreat, in the midst of his own activity.

"Fetch him back," echoed other voices. And as MacMichael enforced his order by a sudden onslaught upon another soldier who was attempting flight, which resulted in arresting the man, fainting with the pain of a badly broken arm, the rest of his companions apparently came to the conclusion that they might as well trust to the mercy of their captors by yielding, as risk such fierce treatment in a fruitless attempt to evade it.

The whole affair had lasted scarcely more than twenty minutes when Sir James Turner bound, and in the charge of William Blair, was being ignominiously carried as a prisoner to a wretched little shieling, already well known to the reader as the habitation of old Elspeth Spence.

The two days spent upon the road thither were horrible enough to the imperious-tempered man, although the stern, preoccupied Covenanters bestowed no addition of insulting words to aggravate the shame of his position. But the case, in this respect, was widely different when he became an inmate of old Elspeth's squalid abode.

Utter comfortlessness, and a diet of ill-cooked oatmeal, might claim for itself, fairly enough, to be accepted patiently for a while as part of a soldier's natural portion, and all in the day's work, as the saying goes. But—! old Elspeth Spence's tongue!!

It is perfectly safe for me to declare that if unlimited doses of that tongue were always to be part of every soldier's portion, there would be no such thing possible as a voluntary army, and even Bismarck himself would find it almost impossible to keep his compulsory one in a state of efficiency. The penalties for desertion would be reckoned light in comparison to the infliction of that ceaseless and untiring tongue wagging day and night at a man's expense.

William Blair, and his companion in guarding the prisoner, both tried from time to time to stem the torrent, out of mingled compassion for the captive and themselves, but all efforts were useless. And they were too anxious to learn tidings of their companions' further doings to have heart for angry arguments with the spiteful-tempered old woman.





CHAPTER XXIV.

GENERAL THOMAS DALZIEL.

IR JAMES TURNER was a prisoner, that was true enough, but the poor Covenanters soon found that they had little cause to congratulate themselves on the fact, when

his place was supplied by General Thomas Dalziel.

You have heard some of the charges brought against the Knight, but of the General it is said that, "of all the foreign adventurers who had brought evil ways from foreign institutions and practices, he had brought home the largest stock of ferocity and rapacity. Others had chiefly served in the centre of Europe, and the Thirty Years' War. They learned enough of evil there; but Dalziel had been doing the work of the barbarous Muscovite far off at the back of Europe."

Of course it goes without saying that it did not tend to make him more merciful to the Covenanters "that he was an honest and ardent fanatic for royalty. Of this he carried about a perpetual sign in a beard which had grown since the death of his beloved master, Charles I."

But, in spite of all this, the appearance of this General Dalziel was such an intense delight to the boys of Charles the Second's time, that for the sake of the boys of the reign of Queen Victoria, I will give the description of him quoted by Mr. Hill Burton in his most enjoyable history. Cruel monster as he was, by the education of circumstances, he cannot, one imagines, have been wholly bad at heart, any more than most people are.

He who stands at the door and knocks, even up to the very end, causes some stir to be made now and again, faint though it may be, and almost unconscious, to clear a corner for the offered guest.

"The Czar of Muscovy, under whose banner Dalziel fought courageously against the Turks and Tartars, for his great bravery and military conduct promoted him to the rank of General, and on his return to Scotland ordered a testimony of his services, in the most honourable terms, to pass the Great Seal. He was bred up very hardy from his youth," says Captain Crichton, "both in diet and clothing. He never wore boots, nor above one coat, which was close to his body, with close sleeves, like those we call jockeycoats. He never wore a peruke, nor did he shave his beard since the murder of King Charles I. In my time his head was bald, which he covered only with a beaver hat, the brim of which was not above three inches broad. His beard was white and bushy, and yet reached down almost to his girdle. He usually went to London once or twice a year, and

then only to kiss the King's hand, who had a great esteem for his worth and valour. His unusual dress and figure when he was in London, never failed to draw after him a great crowd of boys, who constantly attended at his lodgings, and followed him with huzzas as he went to Court or returned from it.

"As he was a man of humour he always thanked them for their civilities when he left them at the door to go in to the King, and would let them know exactly at what hour he intended to come out again, and return to his lodgings. When the King walked in the park attended by some of his courtiers, and Dalziel in his company, the same crowds would always be after him, showing their admiration of his beard and dress, so that the King could hardly pass on for the crowd.

"Upon which His Majesty would make a pretence of great wrath with the old soldier for bringing such a rabble of boys together to stare at his queer costume, and request him (as Dalziel used to express it) to shave and dress like other Christians, to keep the poor bairns out of danger. All this could never prevail upon him to part with his beard; but yet, in compliance to His Majesty, he went once to Court in the very height of the fashion; but as soon as the King and those about him had laughed sufficiently at the strange figure he made, he resumed his usual habit, to the great joy of the boys, who had not discovered him in his fashionable dress."

There! It does seem strange, drearily strange, that this man who so good-humouredly fell in with

the fun and merriment of English boys should have so acted in the North as to make the bravest of Lowland Scotch boys turn pale, perchance, at the mere mention of his name.

The Covenanters met with success at first sufficient to encourage more timid brethren to join the original company on the march towards Edinburgh, until their numbers amounted to about three thousand. But the strong reinforcements looked for from the eastern side of the kingdom never appeared, and while encouragement thus failed many things occurred to damp the ardour of their spirits, and to check their rising hopes.

For one circumstance, the month was November. And I dare say you know very well that Scotland is one of those countries of which it is said that—" No, it does not always rain there, because it sometimes snows." The Scotch are a wonderfully hardy race, wonderfully abstemious and enduring when circumstances appear to require or recommend those virtues, but even Scotchmen grow down-hearted when all the bare necessaries of life fail them; and when these so-called hapless "rebels" came in sight of Edinburgh, with all the appearance of power about it imparted by numbers and rich abundance, they began to understand the futility of any attempts on their part to subdue it. By crowds they began to return to their homes, and there was only a starveling band of about nine hundred left when General Dalziel at length encountered them at Rullion Green, and

effectually dispersed them, the Presbyterian peasantry of the east actually inflicting as much suffering upon their poor scattered brethren of the west, as did the cruel victorious army, during the early days of the flight.

But the failure of hope, and a day's defeat, were by no means the worst consequences of this forlorn expedition. "The result of the affair was to strengthen the hands of the Government It had been peace, and was now war, which gave a large increase to the license of their conduct. They could plead that they were in an enemy's country, where the distinction between those in arms and those peaceably disposed was too nice to be drawn by a rough soldier."

And it was not only "rough soldiers" who claimed the awful license to act with extra and most barbarous cruelty, for Courts, where calmness and reason are supposed to reign supreme, made themselves infamous by the scenes enacted in them in those days; counsel and judges made their names synonymous with injustice instead of justice, by their perversion of truth, brow-beating of witnesses, and the frequent condemnation of them for their extorted testimony.

"The trials that followed the affair of Pentland Hills were the first to become infamous by the free use of torture. The question of torture had been in use both in England and Scotland, but in both countries it was very odious. Two instruments were chiefly in use in Scotland. One was the boot, an iron cylinder in which the leg was placed, the infliction

being by the hammering in of wooden wedges to the required point of injury and suffering. The other instrument was the thumbkin, which held the thumb tight while thin screws were run into the joint; an ingenious device for producing the greatest amount of suffering with the smallest instrument and the least labour."

Besides what was done to the poor victims, if they were brought prisoners to the bar of the Court of Justiciary, the Scots Estates took to trying and convicting those who were not present to defend themselves; and then, when any of these condemned individuals were afterwards caught by any of their enemies, they were shot down, there and then, without mercy or deliberation.

Those who had compassionately harboured them, or in any way ministered to their wants, were often treated in the same way, and if they were not actually killed, their homes and farms were pillaged to such a degree, by way of fine, that they were reduced to the verge of ruin. Frequently they were so utterly beggared that death from starvation ensued, if they were not able to meet with others who, in their turn, were willing to incur these tremendous risks for succouring them.

And so, having thus briefly made you acquainted with the state of affairs, as affecting the Covenanters in general, you will better understand the position when we now turn to see how they affected the characters of our tale in particular.



CHAPTER XXV.

MARY BLAIR LEAVES TOO SOON.

O, my dear lady, no. I beseech you lay no commands upon me to remain. At any hour he may return home, and cruelly hard it would seem to him if I

were not there to comfort him."

It was Mary Blair who spoke. Not five minutes since she had presented herself at the McCalls' cottage with a worn face, and questioning eyes, which had well-nigh pierced every nook and corner of the place before she had time to enter it. The search was fruitless. Her knees failed her, and she almost fell against the door-post for support.

Mistress McCall hastened forward to her help, but the woman looked past her to her son. "Oh! Maister Ivie, dear, have ye seen William? My William?"

The very heart of love was in that "My," as it came forth with a low, imploring wail from the trembling lips.

Two or three weeks had passed since that evening rout of Pentland Hills, and nothing had been heard of William Blair by his poor wife. She now learnt that the McCalls also were equally ignorant of his fate.

"Have none of the party who have escaped been merciful enough to bring you any news?" asked Kate McCall, half in wonder, half in indignation.

But the indignation was not merited. Several had been to visit the lonely wife, amongst others James MacMichael, with a double shadow of gloom upon his brow; and they had given her much information, only none about her husband.

"MacMichael says that he is sure he was na' o' the twenty or so 'at were hangit in Edinbro', and that is all 'at he can tell me. I thocht maybe when he did na' coom hame that he wad ha' sheltered here."

Mistress McCall shook her head sadly. "Nay, Mary, you know that William will not enter any more beneath my roof."

Mary Blair turned her face, gazing away over the winter-desolated moor. "A mon may do much 'at is na sin, when he is fleeing for 's life frae his enemies. But sin' he is na here, maybe he will be wending hame at last, and so I'll e'en say good-day, and gang my ain ways thither too."

The lady put up her gentle hand, drawing the woman's weary face round towards her again. "Puir thing!" she said tenderly. "Ye are e'en tired now, and there is a wild storm blowing up. It has

been threatening since yesterday. You must e'en let me put you into my bed for a long rest, and tomorrow you shall return, if the roads permit."

Then came the cry with which this chapter opens, and as though she really feared that such physical or moral force might actually be exerted as should prevent her escape, if she delayed her departure any longer, she had scarcely pronounced her pitiful words—"if I were not there to comfort him," than she fled away back towards the distant Blair's Farm with a swiftness that might have almost defied even Ivie McCall's fleet-footedness to catch her.

An hour later both he and his mother heartily wished that he had made the attempt, and had successfully employed the powers of persuasion which the poor wife feared, for the brooding storm suddenly burst over the country with wind and snow, and a darkness that made such a walk as lay before her doubly dangerous.

"If only Mary had come back to us," murmured Mistress McCall, as she sat with hands forced to idleness by the early gloom.

Ivie stood with his face pressed against the thick, dull glass of the narrow casement, peering into the dense falling mass, so soft and fragile, and yet so resistless in its might. As his mother spoke he suddenly bent his head, with a more strained effort to pierce that moving veil. He stood thus, silent and motionless, for some moments, and then left the window to hasten to the door.

"She has come back, mother dear. And time too, for she is struggling through the snow as if she had more to do in battling with it, even in this sheltered place, than she can manage."

However, the battle had been gained, for by the time he had succeeded in forcing the door open against its white barrier, the figure he had been watching had gained the threshold and made a dash within, the instant it was possible, without waiting for a welcome. But—

"Who is it!" exclaimed Kate McCall with a stifled cry.

Whoever it was, it certainly was not Mary, unless she had changed the customary habit of her garb very much during the course of her walk, and also unless the snow-storm had added twelve inches to her height. But there came another cry from Ivie, quickly following his mother's:

"Who are They!"

Darkness, the snow mantle, and within that outer covering a mass of plaid wrappings, had made everything indistinct, but as the logs on the hearth blazed up, and the snow was shaken off, it became apparent that two visitors had been admitted to the cottage, one man carrying the apparently lifeless body of another.

"Who are you?" gasped the involuntary hostess in an awed whi per.

"Do not let yourself suffer alarm, dear madam," said a rich, deep voice, as its owner bowed. "You

have seen us both before. We are both friends. This poor fellow here on the floor is one of the most faithful you have, I believe."

Sobs from the lady, a great gulp to keep them down from Ivie, answered him. They had discovered the identity at length of one at least of the new-comers to their home.

Of his own free-will William Blair had never entered the cottage while he believed its inmates to be living in violation of their duty, but he lay there now, inanimate before them, brought thither without his own consciousness.

"And you know me also, do you not?" asked the second visitor, after he had allowed his companions a short interval to regain control. "I am not altogether a stranger to you, am I?"

A slight smile flitted across Kate McCall's face even in the midst of her emotion, as she replied: "I scarce can find in my mind how I ought to answer you. I have never yet seen your face, neither do I know your name. Yet I have learnt one thing," she continued more gravely, "of more consequence than that; you are a friend of those who suffer, I believe."

"It was foretold by one who lay dying on a battle-field, that I should be so," was the quiet reply. "And I have ever since held the prophecy for a command. I hope I have not delayed too long in bringing this poor fellow to your care; but it has been a matter of supreme difficulty, owing to his weak state from

recent illness. And the search after him has been the more keen from the part he has taken in the custody of Sir James Turner. There is a price put upon his head."

"Bloodthirsty wretches!" burst forth Ivie. "I marvel that they let not loose amongst us ravening mad dogs, and kill us if we muzzle them, because it pleases them that the dogs should be free to bite."

And then he bent lower over the deathly cold hands which he was striving, as diligently almost as Mary had done some weeks ago, to warm back to life.

That night the stalwart, healthy visitor remained at the cottage as well as the invalid whom he had brought thither, for even his giant vigour had been somewhat overstrained, and he did not feel quite equal to a second immediate combatting with the steady, blinding onslaught of snowflakes, that had already succeeded in completely blotting out all roads and landmarks.

Fortunately just before dawn the downfall ceased, and the Englishman took his leave of the pair who had been watching all night beside their slowly recovering patient.

"I would offer to let his poor wife know of his whereabouts," he said, as he bent down for a last look at Blair. "But for the same reason that I have avoided taking him there I would avoid doing anything to bring her here. She and the farm are both closely watched, and ceaselessly. Even this cottage

will doubtless come in for another searching, sooner or later, so I would advise your friend's removal to a safer hiding-place as speedily as possible."

Ivie stretched out his hand with an irresistible impulse of entreaty. "If you would abide here you would be protection for us all."

But the stranger shook his head. "Indirectly and unsuspected I can do a good deal, but directly, and my efforts known, I should be worse than powerless. I go now South, to the Court in London, to prevent any shadow of suspicion clinging to my name. A few weeks hence I hope to revisit the North and you. May God grant that calm may have returned to this poor land, and that nothing may occur to disturb your peace. Once again, dear madam, let me crave your prayers."

And so he stepped across the threshold, and was gone, little dreaming that he should never see that home again, and that he, himself, was become the innocent cause of its destruction. That in rescuing one he had brought ruin upon others, for whose sake he would readily have borne and risked far more.

He had said most truly that Blair's Farm was closely watched, but it had never entered his mind to think whether spies might not be also about the neighbourhood of the McCalls' humble little cottage. As he stepped out into the dim morning twilight he was taken note of by the sharp, blinking eyes of that wretched little informer, Birsy the cobbler.

This miserable specimen of humanity, as deformed

in mind as he was in body, had found residence in his old neighbourhood disagreeable to him, as well as no longer profitable, since the seizure and death of Daniel MacMichael. Besides, he went in deadly terror of James the giant, who had openly declared that if the sorrowful circumstances should at any time be traced undoubtedly to Birsy, he should, in his turn, learn what it was like to be seized by those who hated him, that then they would institute a law court of their own to try him, and thereafter punish him lawfully, as a spy, with death.

Whether that culminating act would be lawful or unlawful, Birsy fully credited MacMichael with meaning what he said, and, seeing that trade was so bad also, he decided to flit elsewhere, his choice falling upon a remote hut on the moor, about a mile from the McCalls? A desolate place enough, and unless he expected the rabbits to turn customers, and let him dine upon them afterwards, one would have thought that he now ran more risk of death from his own choice of quarters, than he had done before from a brother's vengeance. But, as it happened, he was not dependent upon the shoemaking business he might obtain, just now, and neither did he have his own will only to consult in deciding where to fix his abode for the time.

Archbishop Sharp had not too hearty a good-will to his clerical brother of Dunblane, whose noble character and Christian charity were in such condemnatory contrast to his own. And in the very nick of time Dr. Sharp got hold of this conveniently small, and equally conveniently unscrupulous, cobbler spy.

"If you find me out anything to the discredit of him yonder, you shall find that you have cobbled your own fortunes to such good purpose as they shall need no further mending," was the significant hint. "And mind you mark well if yon peaceable and wellordered palace be permitted to be secretly a house of refuge for any of these rebels against our laws, and most gracious liege, His Majesty King Charles."

Employer and employed were worthy of each other. About as worthy to be allowed to walk upright on their feet, in the noble attitude of human beings, as the boys who nearly drowned a small, most pitifulfaced dog yesterday, and smashed its poor forepaws with stones.

Birsy had been some days in his new abode without meeting with any excitement or reward for his indefatigable pryings around, when he at last caught sight that morning of poor Mary Blair on her way from the cottage. He had seen her once with her husband, the man for whom one of the chief rewards was offered. He noticed her haste to put distance between herself and the home she had just quitted, and instantly concluded, before the fact, that William was secreted there, and that his wife feared to betray the circumstance by being found in the neighbourhood.

Hungering to secure the reward, he crept down to the little sheltered valley instantly, and cautiously peered in at all the windows, narrowly escaping discovery by Ivie, who took his post at one of the casements, to watch the oncoming storm, just as Birsy hurriedly withdrew.

Malignant rage and disappointment doubly disfigured the cobbler's uncouth face as he retraced his toilsome way in the teeth of the biting blast up the moor. Had he caught sight of the expected prize, satisfied avarice would have so warmed him inwardly that he would scarcely have noticed the wind outwardly. But so far from being gratified by the hoped-for spectacle he had actually caught the sound of a cry from Ivie to his mother.

"Oh! mother, where can poor William Blair be! If only we could get some tidings of him it would be a relief. I would rather know the worst at once than have things go on like this."

The exclamation had had far too genuine a ring in it to be a counterfeit, and Birsy felt that, so fully, as he trudged with difficulty up the brae, that for the time he gave up all thought of paying any further heed to the McCalls. Indeed, the idea occurred to him more than once, as he sat meditating during the dark day, that he had better recommend to his patron, when the next messenger came by, a second shifting of his quarters, for the Bishop was laid up with an attack of illness, and there was little coming or going of any kind at present at his palace. For what there was he could not be held responsible.

But night came. The day had been dull, but the

night was pitch-dark. The day had been cold, but the night was bitter with a penetrating chill that seemed to freeze the very bones inside a body. Birsy was too hungry to sleep away the dreary, crawling hours, and if he had not been too hungry he would have been too cold. He had plenty of money now to feed himself, and clothe himself warmly and well. But his ill-gotten gains had brought a curse with them. He could not bear to part with them, not even for his own comfort. He suffered privations now that he had never had to bear before. He lay crouched in a cowering, shivering heap, on his straw bed, griped with cold and hunger, and nourishing just the very thing he should have starved. He warmed and fed his evil nature with evil thoughts. He so worked upon himself, that had any one been able to read the inner workings of his brain, they might have discovered an actually half-formed idea there, that William Blair most certainly deserved hanging now, whatever he might have done before, for inflicting such a disappointment upon him.

But the slow night passed on. By degrees dawn began to give faint signs. The snow ceased to thicken the air with its dense fall, and Birsy's thoughts fell into a new train, eager once more, and with dawning hopes. Mary Blair must have been at the cottage for some purpose, and certainly not to say that her husband was at home. That place was being far too strictly watched for so much as a rat to creep in unperceived.

Perhaps that lad had, after all, not only nearly seen him peering in, but had quite done so, and his speech about William Blair had only been a blind, in spite of its sound of truth. Indeed the state of the case certainly must be so, Birsy decided at last, and at any rate it would do no harm to steal down again, and make a second effort at discoveries.

Even the smooth snow he would have to tread did not deter him. His feet were so small they would but leave traces as of some child's feet, and if he were tracked to his lair it would not greatly signify. At least—that was to say if he were tracked by any but one man. And out in the midst of the snow that freezing December day he grew hot as with a burning fever, and prayed, or rather he strove to pray, for he and prayer were too great strangers to meet all in a moment at his wish, and that a wish prompted by no penitence, no shame, no grace at all, only deadly, bodily fear.

But, from the door of the cottage to which he had approached so perilously near, strode the muffled figure of a man, whom he believed he should be able to recognize in any disguise for his avowed mortal enemy.

Utterly oblivious to the pain of torn face and hands, he plunged himself, with the desperation of his terror, into the midst of the thorns of the gorse bushes, crouching low till he should see in which direction the thickly enwrapped individual would bend his steps.

Even James MacMichael's fury against the base informer would have been in great part satisfied had he been able to know of the sufferings the miserable creature endured for the space of two minutes, which seemed to lengthen themselves out to two days.

But "time and the hour run through the roughest days," and the roughest minutes also. Birsy's suspense and terror came to an end as the shrouded giant, having climbed the brae for a few yards, turned short off into a narrow sheep-track, and took a path followed by the shepherds belonging to a neighbouring village, whose inhabitants were well known to be favourable to the Covenanters, and much given to providing them with shelter and the necessaries of life.

This choice of direction would have confirmed the cobbler's suspicions, had they needed it. But he was as thoroughly convinced that he had been watching James MacMichael, as if the man had, himself, declared it to be so, in MacMichael's own well-known harsh stern voice.





CHAPTER XXVI.

ALAS!

N my power—in my power—in My power."

The last "My" came out with a perfect shriek.

If the Scotch superlative belief in invisible imps of mischief, in fairy beings of special spite and malevolence, could be at any time justified it might have been when the impish Birsy stood on the open moor screaming out those words.

The object of his alarm had walked away in one direction, and for the past half-hour he had been hastening along the opposite road towards a goal he had often been reminded that he was to seek, should he see fit occasion for it.

He had just reached the summit of the rising moorland, and close beneath him lay what he desired. A truly fiendish delight seized him, and, pressed for time as he felt he might be for the attainment of his purpose, he still could not resist the temptation to indulge in a brief minute of premature exultation over the destruction of his dreaded foe.

Just below him there were the dragoons. Not ten minutes more, scarcely five minutes in spite of the snow, and he should be amongst them telling his tale, and guiding them, one detachment to the last night's resting-place, another to the refuge sought to-day.

Meantime he danced in the thick, pure white snow, and shrieked out his exultation—a hideous little figure, and his clothes filthy and ragged, and his face all streaked with dirt and blood and scratches, and his fingers stretched forth with a sort of half-clutch of eagerness, instinct with the heart's cruelty.

He had betrayed the one brother, sick, saint-like, sorely persecuted for his faith's sake, to death; now he gloated over the near prospect of betraying the second brother to a like fate, to be aggravated by yet greater barbarities, as he was accused of greater crimes.

Birsy knew perfectly what ghastly measure of punishment, so-called, awaited James MacMichael, were he caught by the soldiers under one of General Dalziel's officers, and his malevolent joy increased as he thought of it.

"You threatened me with judgment, you threatened me with death. You made me tremble and shake and shiver with fear. And now, Ah! ha! Now you are in my power, in my power—in My power."

This is an awful picture, is it not, this of this terribly base, cowardly, cruel cobbler Birsy. Take care that none of you, yourselves, bear a shadow of a resemblance to it. Not long ago I was walking along

a London street when I heard a sharp, disagreeable voice exclaim:

"Ah! you threatened to punch my head, didn't you? Now I'll just punch yours, and let you know as I've done it too, before I leave off."

A quick cry of pain the next moment told that he had begun. He was not able to carry out all his threat, happily, because a man passing at the time caught the "punching" boy's hand, and set the punched boy free.

"Now, you young bully," he said, "suppose I let fly at you?"

The boy immediately began to cry and howl. "He hit me first."

"Yes," admitted the other sturdily, "because he whacked my little sister over the arm with his hoopstick."

"How often did you hit him?"

The brother stared rather. "How often! Why, only once, just to show him, you know, sir, that I wasn't going to stand such a thing as that. I had to leave off then anyhow, because—because—"

And the bright-faced boy hung his head rather sheepishly. "I—I had—to try to stop my little sister crying. She's only a little bit of a thing, and soft-hearted, mother says. And then Joe there come up behind, and caught a fellow unawares."

Humph. There are some boys that sisters like to mend gloves for, and make paste the exact proper thickness for amateur book-binding. And there are some boys who make uncomfortably correct shadow-likenesses of Birsy, the spy cobbler. Bah! This kind ought to be all planted on desert islands where cocoa-nut trees and vines don't grow, and where there are neither monkeys, parrots, nor palm-trees.

But there is Birsy all this time with his scratched hands and scratched face, and torn clothes, looking down at the instruments of his revenge. He can distinctly see them shovelling away the snow around their temporary place of sojourn. He wonders how many of the rebels will get taken, shot, and buried in the snowdrifts during the course of the winter, and as he is so wondering he stumbles over something, and nearly gets buried in one himself.

Birsy recovered his footing, and looked down at the obstruction. It was a bird lying there, frozen to death. It looked so beautiful with its dark, smooth plumage on the white ground, and so pitiful. Birsy sent it dashing against the jutting crags, with a savage kick. Then he continued his way, congratulating himself now on the intense cold which had frozen the snow hard enough to bear his weight.

On the return journey he made the soldiers carry him up the brae, craftily declaring that they could never find their way without him, and that he could never find strength to be their guide that day, if he had to use his own feet. It was at any rate tolerably evident that under those circumstances he must be a slow one, and so he was allowed his will, for his anxiety that James MacMichael should be secured

was quite matched by the officer's desire to get hold of Blair, through whom the service had suffered such indignity in the person of Sir James Turner.

The mere idea of a commander of dragoons being the prisoner of a rabble of those beggarly Covenanters was insupportable!

Those same beggarly Covenanters, because of their holy Covenant with God, because of their deep devotion to His holy laws, had spared the life of the tyrant when he was in their power, although he had never spared theirs, but that was a mere matter of detail, not worthy to be even so much as taken note of in men's minds, much less mentioned as admirable, or an extenuating circumstance. Their daring to inflict such a disgrace was altogether intolerable, without thinking of anything further, and the disgrace must be wiped out with blood. Much had been already shed for the purpose, and more should be.

It was in this spirit that the officer and his men drew in sight of the McCall's cottage. Having guided them thus far, Birsy came to a halt by his own desire, while the rest of the party hastened forward into the little valley. He had no wish to be recognized as the informer, by the Covenanters, when it could be avoided. He had already experienced the disagreeables of being known for one. He was content now to take up a position whence he could see all that went on, without much probability of being discovered by eyes that knew nothing of his near neighbourhood.

So intently were Ivie and his mother occupied with their suffering patient, who was still scarcely conscious, that the soldiers were already within a hundred yards of the cottage before the inmates became aware of their approach.

The forgetful shout of one of the men to his unruly horse led Ivie to glance through the window. For a moment he seemed paralyzed.

"Mother!" he gasped-"Look!"

Then he stooped low over the bed, and whispered in low, clear tones—" William, the dragoons are upon us. Help us to hide you."

There was a feeble effort to rise. Selfish fear was not stimulus enough to combat weakness. "For my sake, William," came the hurried addition. "For my sake, William, hide, or they may kill me too."

Before the plea was well pronounced Blair had started up from the bed and staggered to the door. "I will go forth to the huntsmen, Maister Ivie. Let them take the sheep, that they may let the lambs gae free."

But whilst he was speaking Mistress McCall had opened the narrow door leading into the small chamber already mentioned as affording a seasonable refuge for Ivie, and together she and her son, with affectionate force, pushed the proscribed man in and locked him up.

They had scarcely done so when thundering raps, showered upon the cottage walls and windows, as

well as the outer panels of the door, imperiously demanded admittance.

"Who knocks?" called Kate McCall.

"Those who stand upon scant ceremony," was the curt reply, as the Commander opened the house-door and strode within without waiting for a leave. "Search the place," he said to his men, who instantly dispersed, while he turned back to the lady, fixing his eyes closely on her countenance as he asked —"Where is the other member of your family?"

Her colour went and came, then faded to a deadly pallor. "'The other member,'" she repeated faintly. "I am a widow, sir. And I have one only child, whom you see here before you."

"Oh, yes, I see him plainly enough," was the reply, in a tone that pierced the mother with a sharp stab of apprehension. "I shall have a word to say to him by and by, perchance. At the present moment I want to know where that third person is whom we saw him helping to escape from this room. You will save us a little trouble if you tell."

"I can tell nothing," came the low, firm answer, but that I trust in God he may have escaped your cruel hands."

"Oh, indeed! then your trust will be betrayed for once, I am afraid," came the scoffing answer. And the officer addressed his company, who had now returned to him from the fruitless search. "Strip off the roof," he ordered, "and smash the casements out.

"Madam, this is cold weather to dwell in a roofless

home. Do you still refuse to tell me where the fugitive is concealed from the King's officer?"

Kate McCall clasped her boy's hands tightly in her own, and spoke no word. Thus the three stood confronting each other all the time that the first part of the work of ruin was proceeding. Then he demanded for the third time:

"Tell me where the man is concealed."

Mistress McCall shook her head. "I would as soon betray my own son to butchery as one who has sought shelter within my walls."

"Then a warm shelter shall it be," was the sinister reply. "Take the woman and the lad forth," he exclaimed to his men, "and guard them as carefully as they see fit to guard rebels."

The men sprang forward, nothing loth, to execute this further command. They had no more reverence or respect in their compositions than they had compassion or generosity. But Ivie and his mother drew back proudly from this last threatened indignity.

"If you insist upon our leaving our home we will walk forth, without troubling you for aid in doing so," said Ivie coldly, as he took his mother's arm within his own, and drew her towards the door, even the rough, hardened men around falling back before his noble, grave young face, to make way for the pair as they moved forward.

On reaching the threshold Ivie turned to the officer again. "Before you insist further upon our ejectment, permit me to inform you that you may find yourself to have been guilty of over-zealousness, even in the eyes of those in authority over you. My mother is the sister of the Bishop of Dunblane."

The dragoon turned contemptuously upon his heel. "Tell that, my lad, to those who have a good capacity for being gulled. But even if your story were true it would make no difference. His superior of St. Andrew's would give him little support, believe me, in attempts to screen those who harbour these obstinate rascals."

With a low sigh mother and son stepped out of the cottage which had been their home for five years past, and as they did so their oppressor gave his final order with a jeering laugh.

"Now, fellows, bestir yourselves. Gather every stick of furniture you can lay hands on, pile it up just within the door here, and fire it. If we cannot find the rat's hole we will see if we cannot smoke out the rat."

This speech the McCalls did not hear, and it was not until they saw the flames rising from their burning property that they knew what last barbarous device the enemy had hit upon to discover their sacredly guarded secret.

With a piercing cry of horror Kate McCall sprang towards the officer, who stood outside on the stone flags of the front court coolly looking on at the hestruction of the goods, and watching narrowly for the expected appearance of a human figure in the space beyond.

"Ye must verily be a fiend," she exclaimed, almost beside herself with fear for the poor sufferer within, and with indignation against the persecutors. "He will be burned to death. Ye have so placed your fire that he cannot get forth. He is in the little chamber behind this door."

She had told at last. But instead of exulting over the extorted confession even the officer was staggered by the information, for the second. If the man were consumed in there where would be the proof that the wrecking of the cottage could be justified? There did begin to appear some peril looming in the distance, that the Bishop of Dunblane might call some one to a heavy reckoning for this day's work.

Ivie instantly perceived the change of expression, and instantly took advantage of the anxiety it showed. "Lend me one of the most courageous of your men," he said quickly, "and we will rescue him."

"The whole interior is on fire," was the reply, with a mingling of longing and irritation.

Ivie waited for no more. Nodding to a soldier who had stepped out from his companions, a sign that he accepted a share of the dangerous work, he darted round to that back window at which Henry Savile had formerly startled Turner, and leapt in, followed by our old acquaintance, Flemming.

In a cupboard just within hung some plaids which they wrapped about their heads and faces and their hands. Then they dashed on through smoke and flames to the door, visible enough now, for the housedoor which had concealed it was consumed by the fire.

"I cannot find the key," groaned Ivie. For reply his companion dashed the panels in, and they both paused for a few seconds inside the cool apartment to take breath. But the pause threatened to be fatal to them all. The flames took no time for thought as they rushed in to the new space offered for their wild triumph.

"Oh! help me; hasten," gasped Ivie, already struggling unaided to lift William Blair's almost lifeless body in his arms, and carry him through the raging element.

A gleam of pity passed across Flemming's face. It came to his mind that, after all, he was showing but cruel kindness in helping to effect this rescue. A minute's smoke penetrating through that door, and the Covenanter would have escaped, in his swoon, from all further persecutions that man is permitted to inflict upon God's people, for some wise reason which we shall surely learn hereafter.

This whole matter had been a growing puzzle to Flemming ever since his witness of the peaceful, prayerful death of Daniel MacMichael. But of course his thoughts at the present instant were of the swiftest and least weighty. Whenever he had embarked in an undertaking he liked to go through with it, and successfully. Two minutes later he and Ivie, with their burden sheltered closely between them, had regained the window by which they

entered, and so strongly is the admiration of personal courage implanted in the human breast, that even the brutalized officer joined in the cheers bestowed upon Ivie as he was helped over the sill, so scorched and disfigured that he would have needed no further disguise to pass unknown by even William Blair himself.

Having secured the prize he was in search of, the commander's sympathy was sufficiently excited to make him resolve upon leaving Ivie his liberty, but, unhappily, before he had time to announce this merciful intention, the admiration of another brought back all his hardness, and determination to execute his plan to the last particular.

Being taller, Flemming's face had not suffered so much as Ivie's, and besides, not being so anxious for the sick man's protection, he had been free to give more heed to his own. For the same reason he was free now to contemplate the boy as he tried to direct his mother's care from himself to their rescued friend.

"Well, young sir," he said warmly, "you certainly are a brave lad. Even Sir James Turner said that, when you braved him, and dashed the cup, he put into your hand, away into the water of the burn, instead of putting the water into it. I wish we had some of that same water now. I doubt if—"

But what he doubted had to remain untold. He had said enough and too much for the poor McCalls. More than enough to make the officer's heart once

more as unyielding as the nether millstone or a block of Aberdeen granite.

They were splendid prizes truly for a stalwart officer to boast of having secured; a man who seemed as if he were hovering on the brink of the grave; and a lad with the flesh literally burnt off his hands in some places, his arms blistered to the elbows, and his face scorched, with the long eyelashes burnt away from the frank brown eyes, and the bright locks from the fearless brow, and all this courted voluntarily, with risk besides of death, to save a fellow-creature's life!

Well, after all, yes. Ivie McCall was a splendid prize, but not according to the sense that his captors gave the term.





CHAPTER XXVII.

LEARNING THE NEWS.

ARY BLAIR had wandered in and out of her house fifty times, aye, perhaps a hundred since she had left the McCalls' cottage twenty-four hours ago. This way and that she had looked to see if perchance her husband might be returning to her for help and a hiding-place. The soldiers around had watched her steps, and noted the direction of her eyes, as closely as they had done for days past, until at length they shared her own hopelessness, and as she finally entered her neat abode, and closed the door, the ambush was given up, and the small detachment was marched off to another more promising locality.

"Those rascally Covenanters no doubt have spies as well as ourselves," said the commander, "who have warned the fellow to avoid his own home like poison. If we had given the matter a half-thought we might have guessed that it was the last place he would dare to venture near."

And so he led off his men only a few minutes

before a demented, hunted-looking creature crossed the very clearing they had made for themselves during their stay, and hurried with a quick, scared manner on to Blair's Farm.

Half-an-hour or so had passed, and Mary, gazing from her window with blank eyes, suddenly lifted her hands, and passed them with a swift pressure over her eyelids. She had thought it impossible that she should be able to sleep again, while this heavy affliction bowed her spirit so greatly with its burden of grief. But yet at this minute she felt she must be sleeping, and dreaming besides.

She had seen a thin curl of blue smoke rising from one of the chimneys of the farmhouse of Blair's Farm. There had been no fire in that abode since Mistress McCall bid her farewell, silent but for fast-flowing tears, on its threshold nearly five years ago. Whose could be the hand that had lighted one there now?

When she looked forth again she knew that she was gazing at no sleeping vision. The first faint blue vapour might be mistaken for dreamy imaginings, but now it had swelled into a dark volume, and rose into the air steadily and continuously. With a glance around to assure herself that all was as ready as she could make it in her own place, to welcome a returning wanderer, she snatched up her plaid once more, and throwing it over her head, she flew across the stepping-stones of the swollen burn, and darted within the farmhouse door.

But one qualm of hesitation did seize her then, as she remembered that the dragoons might have quite possibly chosen such a commodious shelter for themselves from the inclement weather. And there were voices—at least a voice speaking aloud in a strained, high-pitched key, as though addressing some one who was deaf. Mary listened—at first from fear and curiosity, and then, afterwards, because she could not choose but listen, for she was as one rooted to the spot.

"Yes," said the unseen shrill speaker; "oh, yes! I must see to it speedily that I e'en make all things ready for him, and comfortable, for he will be sair tired, I doobt, and cauld. Unless—" And there came a pause, broken by a low wail. "Unless maybe yon fire, they put William Blair and him intil together, will ha' warmed him so as he'll na feel cauld any mair."

Another pause. Mary Blair forgot that the air was far below the freezing point, and tore off her plaid, the great drops standing thick upon her forehead. Then the voice went on:

"They might ha' let me go with my boy, my bairn—the only son o' the widow, I told them that; but they mocked at the hallowed words. And when I lay upon the cauld snow an' kissed their feet, they spurned me. 'Ah, mother, go,' my bairn cried upon me then. 'This hurts me more than all. Go, my mother. I will follow you!' Yes. Those were his own very words—'I will follow you!' And my Ivie

never told a lie. He cannot tell one now, and to his mother. 'I will follow you.' He said that, so I must make haste that all may be in readiness to give him a cheering meal and a bright welcoming."

The spell upon Mary Blair gave way now to her desperation. With one bound she was off the wooden settle in the hall upon which she had sunk down, and stood before Mistress McCall in the farmhouse kitchen, where she knelt warming her outstretched hands at the blazing fire, making no further attempts at preparation, for all the ceaseless repetition of the sentences that spoke of doing so.

The vacant look in her eyes never changed, even when her favourite waiting-maid of old stood there speaking to her, calling upon her by name to tell what had happened to the absent husband, whether there was any reality in the terrible utterances that hinted at his being burnt to death.

At last, half frantic with dread suspense, Mary seized the lady by the shoulders, pulled her up on to her feet, and almost shook her, as she cried out in her helplessness: "Oh, Lord, be pitiful! Have mercy upon us, and give her back her reason."

The answer to the imploring petition came ere long. Slowly the vacant stare faded out of the soft brown eyes, slowly the rigid features relaxed, and with a heavy sigh of returning consciousness she sank into the arms of her companion. But it was not until a couple of hours later that she was able to tell her whole sad tale to the woman who was so full

a participator in its gloom. It was evident even to the mother by that time that it was useless for her to remain at the farmhouse that night, in the hope of meeting Ivie there.

"Besides," she sobbed, amidst her bitter weeping, besides, if he contrived to escape from his barbarous captors, he would be more likely to seek me at the cottage, for he begged me to come to you when I was so cruelly beaten off from following him."

Mary was thankful to lead her across to her own small home. It looked less desolate than the larger house, and while prevailing upon her to take rest and a little food, the two tried to form plans for the future.

"Surely the Bishop will help us to get them set free," was Mary Blair's natural exclamation.

But Kate McCall shivered and shook her head. "I went there before I came here, and I was repulsed from my own brother's door by servants of Archbishop Sharp, to whom I told my errand. My brother lies unconscious, prostrate with fever, and all unable to give us aid."

It was learning this that had caused her reason to give way for a while, and she shuddered at the remembrance. If she too should become helpless the condition of William Blair and Ivie would be rendered doubly hopeless. Her companion wrung her hands.

"Is there no one to whom we can appeal? no one to whom we can turn for compassion? no one in

the whole wide world who will speak a word to save the helpless and the innocent?"

Mary Blair might have uttered her cry with a yet deeper accent in it of despair had she known that an Earl high in power, high in the king's favour, let an intimate friend be beheaded sooner than "worry" that king by speaking a word of remonstrance to him on the friend's behalf! But wdile Mary was speaking, another memory, happier than the former one, had flashed into her lady's mind.

There was the Venice flask, so long unneeded that it had been well-nigh forgotten, and there was the giver. He had been seen but the dawn of that very day, but the tragic events that had passed since he left you little secluded glen had for a while banished the recollection of him also from her thoughts.

Her hands went together in their accustomed fervent clasp. "Yes!" she ejaculated; "there is some one, I believe. We have a friend who may succour us, if God will, even in this dark hour of affliction. Have you forgotten that Ivie had a strange visitor the day James Guthrie died, and that he delivered a flask to him, and a message to be given to me?"

Mary, like her mistress, had forgotten the circumstance, and with better reason; but the circumstance thus recalled to her mind, she was instantly as eager to recover the token as if she had been told absolutely that it would save her husband's life. When the moon rose silvery clear in the brilliant starlit, frosty sky, the two women stepped out into the still night

air, and walked six miles over the hard, bright snow to the burnt-out cottage, to see if perchance they might find some fragment of the treasure amongst the ruins.

Birds and animals had already found refuge from the inhospitable, white-clad earth within the unprotected dwelling, and flew screaming off as the human beings entered the bare, burnt doorway. Kate McCall burst into tears. The desolation of her home seemed a presage to her of desolation of her heart. Her faith in her Lord was warm and true and loving, but even the dear Lord Himself once groaned forth: "If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me."

Mary Blair looked at her sister in affliction with sad sympathy, but her own eyes remained dry. She seemed as though she had wept away all her tears, or that they were burnt up with the fire of her grief. She clambered over the burnt heaps of furniture that withstood their progress at the entrance, and hastened to the little bed-chamber that Mistress McCall had been wont to occupy. It formed a strange contrast to the rest of the place.

Whether from inadvertence, or because they had found elsewhere enough for their purpose, the dragoons had left this room intact. With its fair neatness and simplicity it looked a very haven of peace, a literal oasis in the desert; and as Kate McCall eagerly followed the glad cry that proceeded thence, and found the perfumed flask lying whole and uninjured as she had hid it amidst the few relics

of bygone days, the revulsion of feeling was so great that she now felt as certain that her son and her friend's husband would be rescued, as she had just before felt despairingly convinced of the contrary.

Her newly-risen hope would have been short-lived had she been able to exercise the second sight that her countrymen believed in.





CHAPTER XXVIII.

IVIE McCALL BEFORE THE JUDGES.



HAVE just here, at my hand, an advertisement respecting Dunblane — one of the present day, you know. It praises the climate, and, amongst other matters, in-

forms us that it is a good central place from which to visit the Trossachs, and all the finest mountain and lake scenery in Scotland. More strangely interesting still to Charles the Second and Ivie McCall, could they have foreseen it, would have been the further information that "the railway junction is twelve hours from London, and one and a half from Edinburgh."

It took Mistress McCall and Mary Blair more than the twelve hours to get to their own metropolis from Dunblane, let alone all thoughts of getting to London, as to which, it may be said that it would have been a really impossible journey to them altogether. It was difficult enough for them to reach Edinburgh, although they had the burning zeal of an anxious love to help in carrying them there.

Their eager haste led them to lengthen the distance they had to traverse by some few miles, for they shot past the district in which Elspeth Spence's hovel was situated, before Kate remembered the injunction given, four years since, that she should consult the old woman as to the probable use of the token she carried with her, and how it was to be made of any avail.

Thus more precious time was spent, and still more in waiting upon the slow pace of Elspeth, who refused to give any information meanwhile, either to her sister or the lady.

"It wad be na gude if I did," she steadily declared.

"For ye say yoursel' that ye ken na the face o' him that gaed it ye; and if ye did, let me tell ye, ye might risk his neck by pleading to him to save William and the bairn, but ye wad do them na guid."

"And why can you do it more safely, then?" questioned Mary impatiently.

Her step-sister looked at her from head to foot with supreme disdain for her stupidity—"Gar-r-r," she ejaculated. "Am I a leddy like yon, or a dainty, pawky bit body like yoursel? Auld witch Elspeth speaks to ilka ane she meets, gentle an' simple, an' nane speir what she says. If she were to hould the very bit bottle itsel' in the faces o' all the folk in Edinbro', nane wad think anything but that it held maybe toads or snakes; an' they wad ask na questions, but slip by in haste to get no a spell, maybe, cast ower them."

Whether Mary was convinced by these arguments

or no, Mistress McCall saw sufficient in them to be even thankful that the old woman should be their companion to the city, where they arrived about noon of the dark December day, footsore and pale, but for the crimson spots of excitement that glowed upon the cheeks of the two younger members of the party.

There was one in the crowd thronging the road to the Council Chamber, a small misshapen creature, who was quick to note these signs, and with especial malignity he wriggled his way through the groups till he reached their side, and could hiss up into the lady's ear words that made her cower back, and press her hand upon her heart.

Birsy nodded maliciously. "Hurry to the Justice Hall then, lady, and bid him put by his obstinacy, and open his lips, while there is yet time to avoid that I tell you of."

Even the base informer did not know that there was not yet time for that. The worst that could happen to any one, so far as the body was concerned, with the exception of death itself, or rather, what was worse than death, was already being endured by a sufferer in that shameful judgment hall, where men calmly gazed upon the agonies of their fellow-men, and felt no more pity than they showed.

Having secured William Blair and Ivie, somewhat more quickly than they had hoped to do, the party who had taken the McCalls' cottage for their share of the enterprise at once hastened after the detachment dismissed, according to the informer's instructions, to the village lying south of the moor. It would be a fine thing if they could help in the capture of both of the two chief prizes of the day.

But they might have spared themselves the trouble of this second portion of the expedition. About half-way one of the men thought he discovered a fugitive hidden within a low-lying crevice in the hill-side. But on the whole company, officer included, almost throwing themselves in a heap before the hole, their zeal in hunting human beings was only rewarded by finding an old Scotch bonnet!

Had they looked into that cupboard of nature's providing any time the past night, they would have found there a broad-brimmed, black-beaver hat, adorned with the long handsome plumes befitting a Cavalier's head-dress. But some hours since the owner had fortunately made the exchange, paid for the day's keep of his horse in the village, and ridden at the gallop away on the first long stage he proposed to himself for London.

Henry Savile was such a restless spirit that he was as well known as he was popular, along the various high roads leading to and from the great centre. His royal master declared once that he was certainly a changeling of the fairies, and had originally been intended for a postboy. He would gladly have accepted the office that day, had he known what was going forward, could he by so doing have prevented it. But he did one good thing unconsciously by his absence. He prevented Birsy discovering his possible

mistake as to the man he had observed in the dim winter dawn, and so the dragoons were kept hunting for MacMichael quite on the wrong track.

Many questions were put to Ivie meantime, but he answered none of them satisfactorily, and at last the commanding officer left him in peace, with the ominous threat that he should be delivered over to those who would know how to make him speak to better purpose.

William Blair was in a perfectly comatose state when Edinburgh was reached, and he was flung into prison, to receive such an amount of rough nursing as should suffice to make him conscious, in time, of the punishing he was condemned to endure. His young companion was to be dealt with at once, for two reasons, one being lest MacMichael should have time to get warning to choose a remoter hiding-place, the other lest the Bishop should recover, and interfere for the rescue of the boy who continued to claim a right to his protection.

The first day was spent in preliminary examination, in order to make Ivie criminate himself sufficiently in the eye of the law to excuse his judges in proceeding to any extremities they might consider expedient.

"Are you in any way connected with the Covenanters?" was the first question put to him as he stood there in the great Council Chamber, pale and quiet, confronting dozens of stern faces gathered to gaze at and brow-beat one young lad.

He met the scowl fearlessly. "I am myself a Covenanter."

The clear tones of the boyish voice filled the hall, and struck to the hearts of the listeners. Some there, for all their callousness, would have given much to be able to feel themselves capable of that glorious uprightness, that chose the instant prospect of death, with truth, to a lie or prevarication.

"Yes, yes," exclaimed one of those in authority, a gleam of unwonted softness tempering the ruggedness of his countenance. "Yes, my brethren, young parrots they say learn quickly. Of course they pick up the parrot cry they hear most often round them. We shall doubtless ere long have babes and idiots claiming to be Covenanters. We shall have enough of nurses' work to do if we condescend to punish children on that self-made accusation."

But the passing effort to extend rare mercy to a prisoner was vain. Archbishop Sharp was on the bench. He glanced at his companion, and his lip curled with disdain. Then he turned to the captive.

"Whether the plea just put forward for you be justified or no is of slight moment. What you have to do now is to abjure the Covenants, and confess their illegality. After you have done that we shall take small heed to inquire whether a stripling's puny influence has been for them or against them in the past."

Ivie McCall folded his arms with an unconscious air of determined resolve. His voice was as steady as before, as he said, with a new tone of indignation,

inspired by the whisper of the last speaker's name which he had just heard:

"I am no renegade. The cause my father died to serve is mine. What I have been in the past I am in the present, and with God's aiding grace shall be in the future to the end of life. The Covenants give to God the things that be God's, and to Cæsar the things that be Cæsar's, in obedience to our Lord's command; I will no more abjure them than I will abjure the Christian faith."

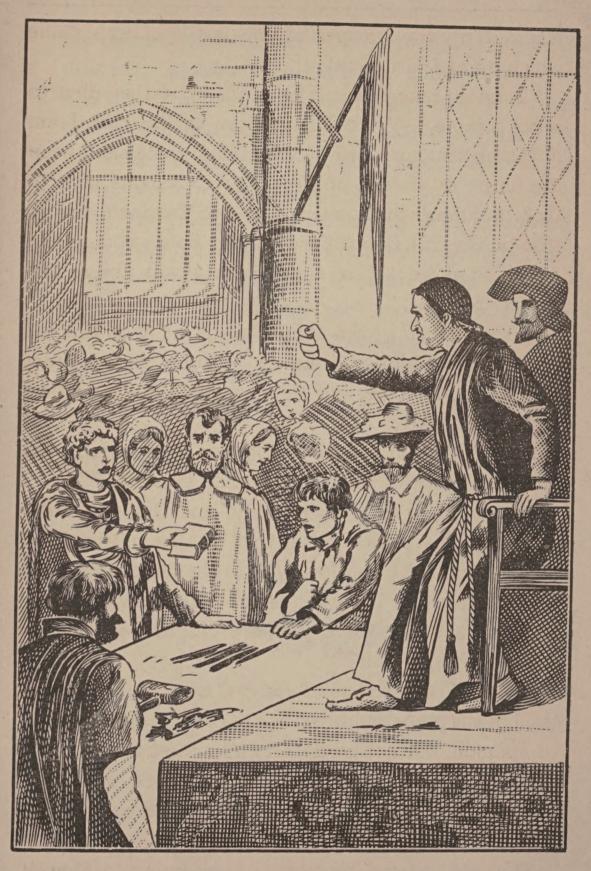
His voice had grown so bold as he went on that all eyes regarded him with amaze. James Sharp's brow was black with rage, and his words shook with passion as he exclaimed:

"Boy! do you defy us? Do you dare stand there and face us with that declaration on your lips?"

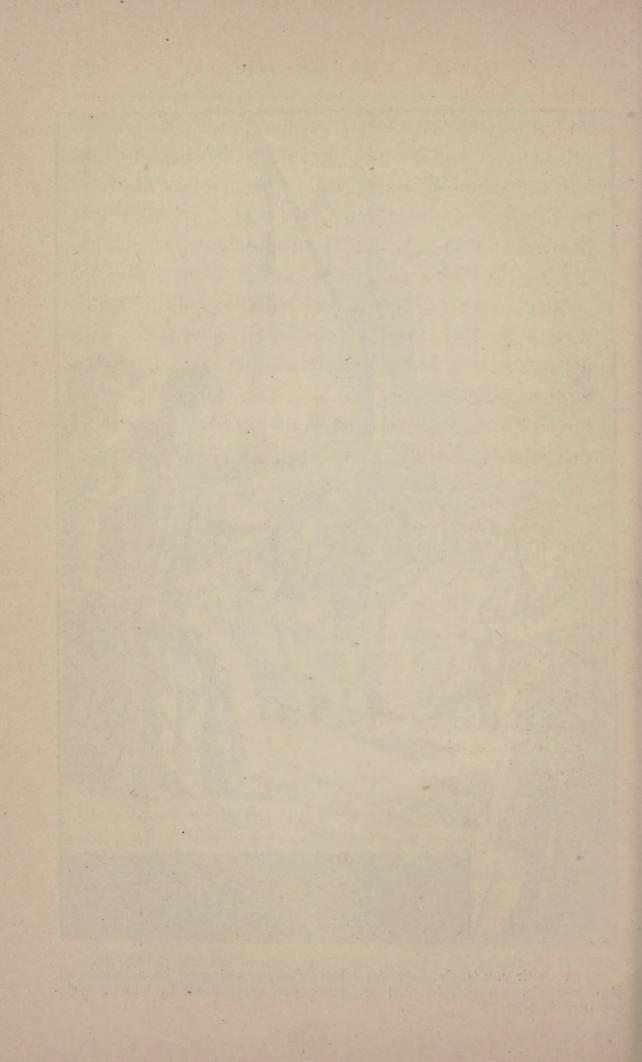
"Even so," said Ivie sturdily, and drawing forth the Bible his uncle had given him from the folds of his plaid. "I can look you in the face, for I have done nothing to be ashamed of. But how will you look in that day when you are judged by what is written in this Book?"

Some of the temporal judges, who were growing tired of the perpetual interference of their ecclesiastical companion, did not hesitate to add point to the question with their glances, and thus increased the sting, and the archbishop's rancour against the one who inflicted it.

Starting up from his seat, and assuming to himself supreme authority for the moment, he shouted to the



"I can look you in the face, for I have done nothing to be asbamed of. But how will you look in that day when you are judged by what is written in this book?"



underlings of the Court: "Ho! there. Remove the prisoner. Confine him strictly, and without food. We will examine him further to-morrow. Perchance twenty-four hours of starvation may tend to curb the insolence of his spirit to a tone more becoming our dignity, and his own advantage."

No one present had a sufficiently deep interest, one way or the other, in the contumacy or suffering of an insignificant boy to care to remonstrate as to this high-handed proceeding, and accordingly Ivie was forthwith led away, and consigned to one of the dungeons foul with all the noisomeness of that age.





CHAPTER XXIX.

OLD ELSPETH'S PRISONER.

want of food, Ivie was dragged forth the following day, and again taken into the presence of the judges and the witnesses,

whilst his mother and Mary Blair, with old Elspeth in their company, had yet three toilsome miles of their journey to perform before they reached Edinburgh. At least an hour must elapse, and in that interval men with an indulged taste for persecuting cruelty could accomplish much.

Birsy had been called into the council chamber at the outset of the examination, but his cowardly fears of being seen by any of the prisoners' friends had so overpowered him that he had been dismissed for a time, long enough indeed for him to court the very danger he had wished to shun, the temptation to harass poor Mistress McCall proving too great for his prudence.

However, so far as the judges were concerned, his presence was little needed by them to aid their inquiries, seeing he had eagerly enough poured forth everything he could think of for their guide, within an hour of his arrival in the city. In pursuance of his most anxious recommendation, the first question addressed to the young prisoner this morning was:

"What was the name of the man to whom you and your mother unlawfully gave shelter lately, and who left your home in the early dawn of this past Tuesday?"

Ivie's listless attitude gave way to one of interest. "I would I knew," he answered quickly. "It is a thing I have long wished. And I would also crave to know by what rule you declare our sheltering of him unlawful, when you know not even if he were not one of yourselves."

"Silence, thou upstart piece of insolence!" exclaimed the Archbishop. "The question is but put for the form's sake. We know well who was thy seditious guest, and thou knowest it likewise. Yesterday, to satisfy rebellious obstinacy, you could make false parade of the virtue of truth; to-day, to shelter a vile ingrate, an audacious rebel against his most gracious Majesty's paternal government, you find no cause to hesitate in the telling of a most bold falsehood."

Young McCall's pale countenance flushed crimson up to the roots of his hair, he made a movement as though to spring forward, forgetting his position, and as the guards seized him, and forced him back, he cried out indignantly:

"The perjured are ever foremost to cast the black imputation of a lie upon others. I have told the truth. I do not know who he was who visited us."

"You do not know that he was the villain James MacMichael," came the taunting reply—"a rascal on account of whose murderous threats a peaceable countryman goes in terror of his life?"

"I—" began McCall. And there he suddenly stopped. Blair had told them where MacMichael was in hiding, and he began to fear that a trap was being laid to discover the place in this roundabout way. His hesitation was instantly seized upon as admission that it was the proscribed Covenanter, and no other, who had lately been the unlawfully accepted visitor.

"You see," exclaimed the questioner-in-chief, addressing his companions with as much elation as if he had just discovered a brilliant virtue in a fellowcreature, instead of believing that he had detected him in a sin. He turned back to the prisoner, and taking his conjecture for a matter of course requiring no further comments, he continued:

"And thus having advanced so far, you will tell us farther, where James MacMichael, the arch-rebel, is in hiding now, and how we shall best reach him."

The boy's face fired again, and lifting his head proudly he exclaimed:

"What do you take me for?—one of your hireling, craven-hearted, base-minded spies?"

There was a weighty pause ere the deliberate, cutting words came, that seemed to freeze the blood

in the veins of some even amongst that hardened assembly.

"No, boy; we take you for no useful, right-minded servant of the Government. Flatter not thyself with such a hope. But hark ye! It concerns thee somewhat closely to listen well. We take thee to be a living creature, composed of soft, yielding flesh, full of nerves, with the power in them of acute suffering, and with bones that can be cracked and crushed, and joints that can be bent and dislocated until the very fashion of the human figure may be scarce recognised."

A convulsive shudder shook Ivie McCall's whole frame. It was keenly marked, and replied to in the same tones of concentrated cruelty.

"Ah! you begin now to understand what we know you to be. You do well to shudder, and to reflect upon it."

Ivie brought his shackled hands together, and his head drooped, as he replied in a voice that was still distinct though low:

"I shuddered not with any thought for myself, but to think that I am of a verity in the presence of one of the damned. For surely the Lord would never allow one of His elect, one of those predestined to salvation in His holy heavens, to fall into so awful a depth of the very pit of wickedness."

For a moment the judge was awed, for one instant the barbarous insolence gave way to a cowed look upon his face; and one and another exchanged stealthy looks and touches with each other. It was very well known that there was a rooted belief in the minds of the populace that the Archbishop had actually entered into a compact with the evil one, and sold his soul to him. He certainly took no pains of late to disabuse them of the grim suspicion by displaying any Christian virtues for their benefit. His present spasm of hesitation was of brief duration, and he recovered presence of mind with a double portion of malice towards the new victim of persecution.

"To retort your own words of yesterday upon you," he exclaimed with a short, hard laugh, "the wicked are ever the readiest to accuse others of doing wickedly. I would advise you to remember, insolent boy, while there may be yet time, that I am acting according to the laws of him who is for us God's vice-gerent upon earth; and therefore I am justified in the eyes of all who are not blinded by pride, obstinacy, and ignorance. But enough. We are not here to argue, but to command and to dictate. Where is the man MacMichael?"

- "I know not."
- "Where was he when you did last know?"
- "I may not say."

"And wherefore?" The questioner's eyes gleamed as he thought he was about to gain the trace, or at least the name, of another malcontent. "Who hath ordered thee to silence on the matter?"

Ivie almost smiled in the midst of this solemn hour. He even felt a sentiment of pity for the blunted perceptions of this middle-aged man set over him in judgment.

"Who hath ordered me?" he repeated. "My own conscience and my own heart have ordered me, through the grace of God, which hath taught me to guard honour as something more valuable than mortal life. I tell you plainly, that I will show nothing in my speech that may betray any of my brethren into your power, howsoever ye may weary me with your questionings."

Again there came that cruel laugh in reply. "Fear not weariness, boy. Thy spirit shall be bowed, and thy obstinacy quelled by somewhat that shall give thee no place to complain of weariness. There is little slumber wooed by the question to which we will even now proceed to have thee put. If our tongues have not power to compel answers, we oft find yonder dumb things have a persuasive eloquence that is irresistible."

"He is young," muttered the voice of him who had felt inclined to show some mercy yesterday. "Add not taunts to the needful punishment of his stubborn will. He is a brave boy."

"Ah! and so much the more likely to prove troublesome in the future if not broken in at once," was the return. And then, with no voice raised in any further dissent, the executioners were summoned, the instruments of torture were brought in, displayed before the prisoner, and explained to him.

"Now," said Dr. Sharp, "we give you one more

chance to save yourself the threatened agony. Once more I demand of you—tell us what you know of James MacMichael's present intentions, and where he is."

"I will do neither," came the firm, clear reply.

"We will see," was the sinister retort.

Ivie pressed his hands together. The blood fled from his face, leaving it perfectly colourless, but he still stood there upright and calm, the very picture of faithfulness and honour.

"You may see this," he said slowly, with his eyes fixed upon the dread instruments spread there before him, "you may see this, a fellow-creature mangled and tormented out of brain consciousness into such passing fit of delirium as shall make the tongue say aught to which it may receive the prompting. I have heard that it hath been so before, I dare not boast that it may not be permitted to be so yet again, with me. But this ye know full well, that what I say in such a state will in truth be unreliable, and of no just or reasonable avail against any one."

"Peace," was the haughty answer from one who knew not the meaning of the word. "Dictate to those who deign to listen to you. We make such use as best pleaseth us of the information we are fortunate enough to know how to compel obstinate tongues to impart. Men, do your duty."

A thrill ran through the court as the hangmen stepped forward, lifted the instrument of torture indicated, and adjusted the boot to the leg of the slim, fair-faced, curly-haired boy. Already the first wedge had been hammered in when Birsy, the cobbler, gratified his malignant spirit by his whisper to Mistress McCall. With a sudden horror of dread for what might be already befalling her only son she darted forward through the crowds, dragging Mary Blair with her, and forgetting old Elspeth altogether.

That latter fact was of less consequence, however, as the old woman was busy at the moment on her own account. She had heard from MacMichael of a certain dwarf spy, whom it would be well for all good Covenanters to avoid entirely, or to punish summarily. She had seen his expression as he addressed the lady, and putting two and two together she drew her own correct conclusions, and acted upon them summarily.

Just at that instant they happened to be in the midst of a group of women, all Covenanters, and steadfast to the cause in secret. Old Elspeth was well known. The dwarf was small and weak, and he was hustled five minutes later into a dark room in one of those giant tall houses that make one imagine Scotch architects must have always had the proportions of their hills present to their minds.

I cannot help having a touch of vengeful delight in knowing that whilst Ivie McCall was undergoing bodily torture Birsy was enduring almost equal mental agony from his fears, as he screamed and howled and raved, and tore at the grated window and the massive door, in the dreary chamber whither he

had been conveyed. For a parting salute, before Elspeth Spence locked him in, she gave him the benefit of one of those alligator glances of hers, with the accompaniment of a nod, and the significant remark:

"And now to fetch James MacMichael to ye."

"Any one but him! any one but him!" shrieked the wretched informer frantically.

No reply was vouchsafed to the prayer, but Elspeth was delighted at its having been uttered, since it made her assurance double sure as to the value of her capture. She turned her friend's key upon him with no more compunction as to leaving him alone with his abject terror than if he had been a jackal. Then she made her way to the grand abode within whose princely walls her foster-son was wont to stay when he was in Edinburgh. But there disappointment awaited her, as we already know, and she had to appeal to him through a messenger.

Meantime, to return to the tragedy being enacted, under the sanction of the law, in the Justice-Hall of Edinburgh, December, 1666. Englishmen had got rid of torture at that date in their own courts, and yet they were glad enough to avail themselves of its hideous use in the northern half of their joint country, and felt no shame in doing so.

The hangman picked up the second of those wedges lying ready for his use. The third—the fourth. The blood began to spurt over the hammer from the crushed and breaking flesh. The blood fell

also, one great heavy drop, from the sufferer's under lip, where the teeth had bitten into it in agony, and the terrible effort to keep back the struggling groans. The sight of that drop was far from awaking pity in the haughty judge's breast. It seemed to excite him to some such fury as suffering is said to have excited, in reality or in seeming, in the breast of Jeffreys.

"Will you speak?" he shouted in a fury to the boy.

"Ah! yes," burst from Ivie. "I will speak: I implore ye, have mercy."

A horrible chuckle of triumph issued from the cruel lips. "Mercy! Oh, yes; we will have mercy, since you have managed to find voice to ask it. Now tell us where James MacMichael is, and you shall be released from you useful friend of ours, and even have a physician's care to ease your pains besides. So haste ye: where is he to be found?"

But the triumph of the barbarous judge proved premature. Ivie moved his head with a faint gesture of despair.

"I asked for mercy," he replied faintly; "not for a reward for dishonour."

To a fresh fierce tirade of denunciations, threats, and insults he answered nothing, and the order was given for the executioners to continue their dreadful work. A fourth wedge was driven in, a fifth was being hammered down, the bone of the leg cracked, and the sufferer fainted.

At this moment there was a hubbub of some sort

around the door of the council-chamber, and then a buzz of voices, a dozen of them finally rising simultaneously into a loud cry of explanation:

"It's nane but the lad's ain mither. Let her in. Make way for the lad's mither. She'll mak' him speak, ye'll see. Let her in."

The argument of the crowd impressed the judges as so plausible that an almost immediate agreement was come to, to accept the recommendation, and scarcely a minute had elapsed since Mistress McCall had declared her name and relationship to the prisoner than she found herself confronted with that dread assemblage of the inquisitors, not of Spain, but of Great Britain, not of the Romish Church, but of the Protestant Church of the Reformation!

You see, it is the spirit of Christ, the mind of Christ, not the name, that is needed to make men Christians. "Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in Heaven."

Certainly if the great object of the Government of that day had been to compel the Scotch to become rooted, to the very depths of their hearts, in hatred to Prelacy, and adhesion to Presbyterianism, no wiser step could have been taken than to inflict upon the land the nineteen years' archiepiscopate of Dr. James Sharp.

It seems to be terribly evident that, as a rule,

wherever cruel work was going forward in the country during that period, there was this bishop standing to the front of the persecutors. Is it not an awful thing to act so during life as that your name gets passed down through the ages with abhorrence? While a man is alive his haughty malice may find gratification in knowing that there is fear mingled with the hate; but he forgets that, tyrant as he is, there is yet one greater than he by whom he will be conquered. Death is coming.

And when the man is dead all fear of him is dead too. He forgets that. He forgets too the lessons taught him by the histories of other men like himself, that as the fear sinks down—a leaden weight, dropped into his grave and buried with him there once for all—something else springs into sudden life—a scathing contempt joins with the hate, and clings with it to his name for as long as the memory of the name itself endures.

A few years ago two gentlemen of ability and position were talking together.

"Do you see much of so and so?" asked one.

The lip of the other curled. "No," he said shortly; "I don't."

The first speaker went on with the subject: "Ah! he is very unpopular. He's well off, has a capital house, and seems anxious to entertain his old set, but his efforts don't meet with much reward, as far as I can discover."

"No," said the other curtly; and then he made a plunge into another topic for conversation.

A short time after I put a question quietly, to the one who had brought forward the name of the unpopular individual.

"Oh!" was the answer; "well, really I do not know much about him myself. He was the triumphant bully of his school when he was a boy." Upon which I echoed my informant's "Oh," and I could not help thinking that the object of the sneer I had seen on the lip of one of his "old set" would gladly give up the half of his fortune if he could but return to his boyhood, and resign his position of triumphant bully, resigning with it the contemptuous dislike of maturer years of his own "old set."





CHAPTER XXX.

NOT A ROMAN MATRON, BUT A CHRISTIAN.

Woman—one who during the past thirteen years had been a complete recluse from the world. Her seclusion had never been

broken through but that once, when she paid her other visit to Edinburgh on the occasion of the execution of the suppliant, James Guthrie.

The hall seemed filled with a sea of eyes to Kate McCall's excited nerves, and, after the first dazed and frightened glance around, her own were stricken with a passing blindness. As she clung trembling to the arm of Mary Blair she scarce remembered for some moments why she was there, or whose face it was that she had tried to discover at the instant of her entrance.

A sharp, imperious voice recalled her but too quickly from those merciful seconds of oblivion.

"Come forward," exclaimed one of the judges imperatively.

Mary Blair advanced a step, drawing her companion with her. But they were too slow to suit the impatience of those watching them, and the order was repeated, with the additional injunction—

"Look towards yonder obstinate lad, and tell us whether ye be the mother of yon Ivie McCall."

As the name was pronounced a piercing cry resounded through the hall—"Ivie, my bairn Ivie, my only one! Where is he?"

The name was all she had heard of the words addressed to her. That recalled her to her object, and disengaging herself from her companion she sprang towards the upper end of the Court, towards the members of the High Commission of Inquiry, and demanded her son of them with the unhesitating eagerness of a bereaved mother recognizing no earthly dignity as worthy to be weighed in the balance with maternal love.

But fearless as her speech was, it was somewhat incoherent from anxiety, and one of those she addressed bent forward, and asked, with passing interest in this slight break in the day's very ordinary proceedings:

"Woman, canst thou not moderate thy hasty tongue? What wouldst thou?"

"My son!" she exclaimed. "My only son, who has been unjustly seized, and is unjustly detained! I demand that he shall be restored to me, and now, in the name of all justice, human as Divine. What have ye done with him? where is he?"

A sinister smile curled the lip of him who sat beside the questioner, and it was his well-known voice that replied coldly:

"Ah, dame, you repeat our own words. We have been asking until patience was exhausted—Where is he? Nay, start not. We have put our question, not as about your son, but to him; and to prove our superior graciousness, we answer you, that he you wish for sits yonder, and when he replies fully to our question we may allow you to carry him away."

Following the direction of the pointing finger with her eyes, Mistress McCall at last saw the fainting form of Ivie, and was about to rush forward to clasp it in her arms. But a sign from the judges to some of their men frustrated the effort. She was caught and held back.

"Nay, dame, not so fast, with your leave, or without it if ye see not well to give it. The lad shall be
recovered from his swoon, and then we will enjoy
the satisfaction of hearing you persuade him to his
own advantage. He hath displayed much that is
hateful in one so young, of obstinacy and disrespect
to his elders and superiors. We would fain see if he
at least possess the virtue of filial reverence—"

"There was never a son who more faithfully fulfilled the fifth commandment," said Kate McCall, passionately. "And he hath nought in him that is hateful, so far as imperfect human sight can see. Let me go to him, ye cruel slanderers, that I may bring him back to consciousness." But the prayer and indignant disclaimer were alike disregarded. She was still restrained from leaving the place she had gained, close before the judicial bench, while the executioners made use of such rough means for restoring those to consciousness who fell under their treatment as long practice had taught them were most speedily efficacious.

Another variety of pain was employed in the present instance, and with a groan Ivie's heavy eyes half-opened and rested upon his tormenters.

"Now," cried one of them hastily, "we have brought him back to life, but he must be spoken to at once. His strength is very low. We can do no more."

"Address your son," commanded one of the judges, and with a wailing sob she cried out to him:

"Ivie, my bairn Ivie! Thy mother is here, and ye are ill, and they will na' let me coom to thee."

At the sound of his mother's voice a gleam of brightness darted back into the dim eyes. What the hangmen had but been able to accomplish in part her cry completed. Heavy tears gathered beneath the burning eyelids and fell, as the tortured boy looked up at the men, and murmured below his breath entreatingly:

"Hide it from her, I implore you. Let her not know how great has been the suffering. Be merciful only in this, and I will entreat God if it may but be that He shall show you mercy."

But meantime, while these hardened ruffians turned

their faces aside from the tearful gaze of the noble-looking, handsome boy, there was not one grain so large as a grain of mustard-seed of mercy in the hearts of those in authority over them, who were certainly their superiors in one thing, and that was hardness of their callous hearts.

He who had constituted himself spokesman for the judges, in this trial, now sternly demanded of Mistress McCall if she knew where James MacMichael was at present hiding. Her start and stare of astonishment at the question were evidently genuine, as was also her tone, as she replied:

"I know not even so much as the name of the man."

A new fear seized upon Ivie lest the persecutors should put her also to the torture, and he exclaimed with a sudden accession of strength:

"It is true. Although I have heard and known much, my mother has known nought. William Blair and I saw no need to put her in peril of such treatment as this, and so we kept her ignorant—"

"Of what you thus dare boldly to confess that you, for your own part, know, and refuse to declare," exclaimed one of his hearers, assuming an air of righteous indignation. "Presumptuous boy, to brave our lawful authority and displeasure. But we will see if a mother's commands may not have more power over your contumacy than ours have obtained."

Young McCall cast a hurried, half-anxious glance at his mother as the judge spoke. But although he met a gaze far more anxious and imploring than his own, his trust in her steadfastness returned, and he raised his eyes once more to those beyond, as he replied firmly:

"From my mother's teaching, by the grace of God, I have learnt to value honour and righteous dealing more than life. She loves me as I suppose, perhaps, only mothers can love who have had to act the part of both parents to an only child. But if it be your barbarous pleasure to torture her by putting me to further torment before her eyes, flatter not yourselves with the vain hope that her lips shall be the ones to strive to make me prove her precepts and example vain."

A sinister, harsh laugh gave point to the answer. "Ah—ha! A Spartan youth thyself, doubtless. And thy mother would pose for the model of a Roman matron! You shrinking, white-faced dame there looks the character surely to the life."

The taunt stung Mistress McCall into quicker consciousness. She faced round upon the scorner, her crimsoned cheeks belying one part at any rate of the insulting speech, and her slight figure seemed invested with a new and sacred dignity.

"I pose for nought than that I am," she said. "Yet let me tell thee this, that, as a Christian woman and a Covenanter, I have all of force of will and firmness that the grandest of the Roman matrons ever had. And I have this besides—the might of Him to sustain me who hath said, 'Trust ye in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.'"

He whom she addressed made an effort to utter a second of those jeering laughs, but passion choked it, for he began to suspect that the pair whom he tried to stigmatize as utterly contemptible would in reality baffle all his power and malignity. The order was given to the executioners, however, in order that cruelty might be satisfied, if not curiosity.

Ivie's crushed leg was once more restored to the boot, and the very men who were hardened by long practice at the work shuddered at the sickening sight, before the victim's apparent death under his sufferings brought them the tardy permission to desist. Mistress McCall had succumbed even sooner to the agony of her sympathy, and instructions had been given for her removal into custody. But woman's skill, aided by the sympathy of the crowd, and the help of an unsuspected friend, baffled the judges in this particular, and while the horribly-maimed son was carried back to his dungeon, the mother was conveyed to a room in the same house wherein Birsy was locked up, who had wrought her so much misery.





CHAPTER XXXI.

KING CHARLES'S MOOD.

ET me invite you to leave Scotland for a few hours, and spend the short interval on English soil.

On a couch covered with white satin embroidered with gold, in one of the ante-chambers of Whitehall, lounged the young Anglicised Frenchman, Bernard. He looked up with lazy indolence as the door opened.

"Ah! my good friend Henri, you are the bien venu, for our merry monarch is in his gayest mood, and for me—Ah! ma foi—I have laughed till I feel the shape of my mouth deranged for—But—hein! you look not much like laughing, my friend. What hast thou?"

"News—evil news," said Savile, as he threw himself down beside his companion. "But say then, Bernard. You tell me that the king is in his gayest mood. There are two sides to that mood—one that will as soon laugh at others as with them; the other

when he appears to find true delight in awaking gratitude."

"It is that side of his mood that he entertains just now," said a voice. But it was not Bernard's.

Both the young men sprang to their feet, bowing low and in confusion before Charles II., whose good-looking face was one beaming smile of boyish satisfaction at the startled surprise he had given his two courtiers.

"I crave pardon," began Savile.

"For what offence?" laughed his Majesty, as he laid his hand on his arm, and led him away. "Think ye, Savile, that I am so wanting in wits as to imagine that I am not discussed, like other men, behind my back? No, no. If you could promise me that none shall henceforth say worse than you said just now, I fear that I should be tempted to turn listener. It is something to hear that, with all my faults, there is one person in the world who credits me with having sometimes a virtue. But tell me. There is some boon you would ask of me, is there not?"

"Yes, your Majesty," began Savile eagerly, and then he hesitated, and looked troubled again.

"Speak on," said the king. "Have no fear. I grant your request before you make it, although," with another laugh, "you have so lately come from my troublesome dominions in the North. Verily I believe that some petitioners from thence would pray me hang the whole land en masse, if it had but a neck; whilst others would have me go down on my

knees, and pray them to hang me, with the rejected Covenant about my neck. But I dare declare you have other matters than such as those on hand."

Henry Savile tried to smile, but the attempt was such a sorry one he gave it up, and settled resolutely back into his former gravity. A messenger from old Elspeth had reached him but an hour since, bringing with him the Venice flask, out of which Graham McCall had drunk sufficient strength to prophesy a future life of kind deeds and holiness for Savile thirteen years ago. And now the son of that same Graham McCall lay broken with torture and threatened with death.

According to Savile's own opinion of himself, he had not as yet in one jot fulfilled the prophecy, but he felt, for the first time, willing that it should be proved false if by giving his own life up at once he might save the lad's. He almost offered the exchange when at last he began to plead for a signed pardon for the young Covenanter.

"Thank you for nothing," said Charles, laughing the third time, but somewhat shortly and bitterly now. "How think you it would improve matters if, in sparing these obstinate, thick-skulled rebels, I sacrificed a stalwart, faithful fellow who may be useful in aiding me against their machinations? But what know you about this boy?"

"Not much. I know him to be honest, upright, brave, and a good son. I know him personally scarcely at all."

"Then why so earnest for his escape from what is, I doubt not, fully the young rascal's due? Why risk annoying me by taking the cause of any of that party upon you?"

Henry Savile let his eyes rest gravely upon the king's face. The two were alone for the minute. "Sire, in by-gone days his father and I were brothers in arms fighting for your Majesty. At the close of the Glencairn expedition he saved my life at the expense of his own. In dying he prayed that the prolonged existence might be blessed to myself and others; he prayed that I might be spared to fight—for Christ."

Charles stooped hastily over a little Spaniel pup, picking it up in his arms, and apparently devoting his attention to it, to the exclusion of all else. At last, after a long pause, he said abruptly:

"I promised you the boon you craved before you named it. Come with me yonder, and wait while I write the pardon. But I warn you, those who are working my will on the Northern rabble do not let the grass grow under their feet. It is little likely that the one you petition for will be still alive when you reach Edinburgh with the order for his release."

A low sigh broke from the courtier as he murmured, "Then in that case he will be free indeed."

By the time the pardon was written, signed, and sealed, all the king's lightness of manner had returned, and as carelessly as though he were speaking of a hat-plume, or of some jewelled toy, he said:

"There, my friend, take it, and with it take another word of warning—Don't brag of your prize until you hold it in your hand, and don't let even the jailers know that they are to give it up until you have got him out."

Savile shook his head with sorrowful impatience. He knew but too well how tight a clutch was kept upon the poor Scotch Covenanters when once they were caught hold of, and in how many ways justice was strained to elude any of the pleas of mercy.

"But I fear, in spite of your advice, you will not declare me excused if I break into Edinburgh castle by force, to rescue Ivie McCall."

The king laughed lightly. "Hardly. Neither will I hold you excused if you are long absent. Scarcely hath one given you glad welcome than you are off again. Who knows but I may try to win more of your gratitude, if you only hurry back while I am still in this good mood for granting unpalatable requests."

Henry Savile bent low, and murmured his earnest thanks for the king's graciousness, little thinking what fresh cause he should soon have for making a further demand upon it. Two hours later he was once more in the saddle on the great North road. Any one, to look at him, would have thought that he carried an order of condemnation rather than a full pardon within the inner pocket of his riding belt. But the fact was that now, for the first time, his mind seemed to have leisure to grasp all the horror

and heart-rending sadness of the news he had received.

More than a fortnight had passed since Ivie had been taken and put to the torture; more than a fortnight since his tender, gentle mother had stood by, a helpless witness to his sufferings; more than a fortnight had passed since the sick man, William Blair, had been flung into a damp and filthy dungeon, in which a dog could scarcely live; and it was pain even to think what his poor wife must have been enduring throughout those heart-breaking days. Something approaching another fortnight must pass before the Englishman could reach the scene of all this misery. And meantime—!

At that point in his meditations the rider put spurs to his horse, and dashed onwards in a headlong gallop, as though he thought a little extra effort might bridge over the "meantime," and turn it into "now."





CHAPTER XXXII.

"BUT BY STEALTH, FOR FEAR."

ENRY SAVILE spent many weary minutes in counting and recounting the days that had passed since he left the peaceful, simple little home of the McCalls in the grey December dawn. And as he counted he grew increasingly convinced that the king had done well to remind him that he was very far from sure, as yet, that he would be able to render any help to his friends. The two captives might already have been put to death, and the two women were perchance dead of broken-heartedness.

You can scarcely imagine how terrible it was to Savile to have to go on riding and resting, and sleeping and eating, with these drear apprehensions filling his mind. I have often wished that I could flash myself along the telegraph wires, and the Covenanters' English friend sorely wished that he had power to chain himself to the wind, and to compel it to bear him with its own swift speed to his desired goal. But,

after all, things were not in quite the desperate plight up there that he supposed. His four especial protégés had met with another friend — also an Englishman.

Flemming was a very clever fellow in many ways, and something of a thinker. Since he had been in Scotland he had seen an immense deal of what was wicked and base, and in every way irreligious, amongst his own comrades; from the commanders down to the rawest recruits. But amongst the Covenanters he had found all otherwise. Even those of the persecuted class who were narrow-minded, and actually uncharitable in profession, lived noble and pure lives, exercised the most unbounded and self-sacrificing generosity towards each other, and a grand forbearance in acts, if not in words, as a rule, towards their enemies. These facts had their due weight on an observant mind.

It may also be confessed that the soldier was by no means a perfect character himself, and feelings of irritation against his autocratic, fierce-tempered superiors did in some measure help him to see the grander virtues of the persecuted unfortunates. Admiration for Ivie completed the change in his sentiments, and although he felt no call to subscribe to the Covenants, and no inclination to put his own neck into more danger than was necessary, by openly espousing the proscribed cause, he secretly resolved to aid it whereever practicable.

It was not honourable to take the pay of one side,

and then, while doing so, to serve the other, of course. But he had been in a bad school of late for learning strict notions of honour, and, as he contrived to help Mary Blair and old Elspeth Spence in getting safe off with Mistress McCall from the hall of justice, he privately decided that he deserved a pat on the back for being a very good fellow.

"Just fancy those women eluding even you!" ejaculated a wondering companion, who had been as much deceived as Flemming had intended folks should be by his great show of fruitless activity. He nodded his head with a knowing air at his comrade.

"Ah, my boy, women are as hard to catch as weasels, and as slippery as eels. But trust me to remember the looks of this lot, and if I come across them again—ah, that's all! If I do, then you shall see what you shall see."

The other grinned, and on his side nodded his head sagaciously. He thought he knew that the poor creatures would meet with all the rougher treatment then for having escaped now. He would have been rather surprised had he known that Flemming had actually made an appointment with one of that "lot" for the coming night.



CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE BEST OF THE CHEESE INSIDE.

ARY BLAIR was what the Americans would call "particular cute." It had not taken her above a quarter of a minute to discover that the English soldier who had been appointed to take Mistress McCall into custody was, in reality, helping the poor lady's well-wishers to hide her away out of his sight. Upon finding this Mary drew cautiously and quickly back to his side, plucking him by the sleeve as she breathed in his ear:

"The Lord's blessing on you. Where is William Blair?"

"Cathedral door at eight," muttered back Flemming; and accordingly to the cathedral Mary made her way at the hour named, half-hoping that this most unexpected dragoon-friend would present her there and then with her liberated husband. A proportionate pang of disappointment struck to her heart when she saw him sauntering up to her, as though by accident, alone.

Regardless of prudence for the moment, in her anxiety, she stretched her hands towards him, gasping aloud, "My husband."

But her forgetfulness nearly cost her dear. As I have already told you, Flemming had a due regard for his own life, and growling an impatient oath at women's stupidity, he turned sharply on his heel, and strode away. Blank despair rooted Mary Blair to the spot, and it was well for her that it did so, seeing that any attempt at following the man would have sealed him in his irritated determination to have nothing more to do with such danger-courting individuals.

He marched off some hundred yards or so, head in the air and brows bent. Then he heard a woman's voice at an open door say, "Ivie, my bairn." The woman's voice was hard and rough; the bairn she addressed was a big, loutish, red-headed fellow. But the name conjured back the memories of things that were softening the soldier's tough heart. He turned again, and retraced his steps to the cathedral.

"Don't speak to me," he muttered sharply, "but listen. Your husband has been removed this evening to an upper room in the temporary prison in Gallows Street, to make way for a batch of stronger prisoners. He has a companion, a petty offender of little account, but hale. Friends are allowed the privilege of feeding the prisoners, you know, at their own expense, and a rope is better worth having than the inside of a loaf of bread, sometimes."

These sentences were all uttered rapidly, almost in one breath, and before the listener had been thoroughly able to understand whether they conveyed any intelligible hint to her, the speaker of them was gone.

"No longer in a dungeon." That was Mary's first distinct reflection upon what she had just been told. There followed the next item. She might carry food to her sick husband. She looked up and down the dark streets eagerly. But it was foolish to do so at such an hour as that. She remembered that it was so, the next instant. Besides, visits were not allowed to be made to prisoners at night, nor to their prisons either. She must wait until the morning, at any rate, with what patience she could. Perhaps the stranger Englishman had given her something else to ponder over, by which to help the patience?

Ah! yes. What was that he had said? Somewhat about a rope—a rope being of more use to folks, it might happen, than the inside of a loaf of bread. "The—in—in—side—of," repeated Mary, slowly and ponderingly.

And then a light broke over her whole face, and she darted back to the tall old house within whose walls lay the terror-stricken cobbler-spy, and her own two friends.

"I am going back," she whispered, when she had mounted to the room wherein her step-sister sat with Mistress McCall, and had closed the door behind her. "I am going back—now!"

"Going back!" cried Elspeth Spence, craning her neck forward, and staring at her sister as though she thought she had gone demented. Mary nodded her head vehemently, and laid her hand over the old woman's mouth at the same time. She was cautious enough now to win Flemming's approval if he had been by to note it. They were beneath the roof of a Nicodemus, something of Flemming's own type, one friendly to the Covenanters, but by stealth in these days of fiery trial, and Mary Blair dared risk her present secret with no cowards. Lest it should be overheard by such she only told the half of it even to her two companions.

"I set out for Blair's Farm now, to-night. Ere the week is out I pray that I may be back again. May the Lord in His mercy watch over us, and all dear to us."

And with little more of farewell or of preparation the heavy-hearted wife set out on her solitary winter tramp. The poor old shepherd burst into tears when he saw his mistress return as she had gone—alone.

" Is the gude mon dead then?" he moaned.

Mary shook her head in hasty denial. "Ah! may the Lord grant not," she exclaimed. "No, no, Donald. They have spared him yet, I trust. But he is nigh starved. I am to mak' a big cheese to carry back to him."

And forgetting fatigue in anxiousness, she sprang up again from the settle and hurried away to her dairy. "You rest, mistress, and I will mak' ye the cheese the while," said the old man; but Mary looked more than half-frightened at the proposal.

"The cheese is for my ain gude mon," she said hotly. "An' my ain honds shall mak' it."

And as a further proof of her jealous affection she shut herself into the dairy, and remained there until the great mass of white curd was fully formed and pressed, and laid neatly in a basket ready to be handed in to her husband by his guards, if she might not obtain the favour to hand it in to the beloved prisoner herself.

"Is it already set, mistress?" asked the old shepherd and general help, as Mary Blair came forth into the house-place carrying the cheese.

He bent his head over it, by way of answering his own question. As he did so he started slightly, lifted his eyes to his companion's face, then dropped them again to the contents of the basket. Mary's own eyes were so worn with weeping and want of sleep that only now, when her attention was thus aroused, did she perceive a darkness at one side of her cheese, as of something showing through the white curd. She beat a hasty retreat again, and when she once more appeared the whole surface of the tempting-looking food was one universal whiteness.

A pitying neighbour from the nearest village carried her on horseback the greater part of her journey back to Edinburgh. She rested a few hours at her step-sister's deserted shieling, and then walked on to the city, and straight to the extemporized gaol where her husband was confined.

The pulses of her heart throbbed with hope when she saw the friendly dragoon standing before the door. Footsore though she was, and almost sinking with exhaustion, she hastened her steps, and with her voice trembling so that she could hardly articulate she held her basket to him—

"Food, my maister—please—food—for my gude mon—one—William Blair—in—here."

Flemming laid his hand on the handle with a reassuring smile. "And mighty appetising food it looks too," he said. "Let's break off a mouthful or so before I take it in, hey, ma'am?"

He stretched out the disengaged finger and thumb to do the deed at once without waiting for permission, and so terrified the poor woman that she burst into a scarcely-stifled shriek. The basket would certainly have dropped had not another hand than her own held it.

"Why, you foolish creature," muttered the dragoon, with a touch of compassion in his voice, "who was to suppose you'd take fright at a word like that? You're as timid as a mouse." He stooped nearer as though examining the curds, and there was a twinkle of amusement in his eyes as he added in a lower tone—"Don't be afraid that I will rob your good man of any of the—inside. Shall I tell him to eat that part to-night?"

There was a slight emphasis on the "to-night," and

Mary clasped her hands as she echoed it. "Yes, to-night. Tell him to cut into the middle. The outside is frozen too hard to be good, I fear."

She was turning away when another thought struck her, and she raised her face to Flemming's again—"Sir, if I may not go to him, may I not at least see the window of the room wherein my husband is a prisoner?"

A sharp-featured, surly-looking officer came up now to the pair, and questioned his subordinate with a voice and manner corresponding to his appearance But Flemming was as equal as usual to the occasion.

"The wife of the man who is to die to-morrow captain. She is pestering me to let her see the window of his room. I have ordered her off about her business."

"Have you so?" exclaimed the officer in a passion. "And pray who are you, fellow, to dare to give orders here to any one without my leave? Come with me, woman, and look up yon at that window at the side there, and pray that the miscreant rebel within may spend the fragment of life left to him in repenting of the base deeds which have woven him the hangman's rope."

Mary Blair drew in her breath with a great sob. She did pray, and earnestly, no doubt of that, although her prayers did not take exactly the direction recommended by the officer. This was the first word she had heard of the imminence of the fate threatening her husband. He must be saved from it

to-night, or she would see him in this world no more. She felt as though she had a rope about her own neck strangling her as she gazed up at the window.

Meanwhile Flemming hastened in with the cheese, chuckling to himself over the clever way in which he had worked upon the contradictory temper of his superior.

"Just for all the world like a mule," he muttered.

"If you want him to go one way you've nought to do but to drive him the other."

Flemming had a very personal satisfaction, besides, in the turn affairs had taken, for now, whatever happened, no blame could be cast upon him for having shown the condemned man's relatives where he lay.

The next morning, when it was discovered that the bird was flown, he went so far as to venture on a reminder to the officer, who, under the facts of the case, dared do nothing but bite his lip and bear the implied rebuke. Flemming's life would not have been worth many minutes' purchase had another set of facts been known though, nor even if the clear and quick instructions had been overheard which he gave to William Blair when he handed him the cheese.

Moving about while he was recommending the precise hour for breaking the cheese, his foot struck against something in the floor. "Ah!" he said, with the air of a person just making a discovery. "Only think! A great iron ring here in the floor. And pretty strongly in too. It would be a heavy weight that

would pull that out, I reckon. Why, they might hang you from that, out of the window here, my friend, and save all further trouble."

And with that cheering remark the dragoon took his leave, and proceeded an hour or so later to render the Blairs a further service, by inveigling a civilian friend into "standing treat" to his comrade who was to go on duty for the first watch that night.

He had now done all he considered it safe to do for these Covenanters at the present crisis, and he took care to be a prominently visible member of a noisy drinking party at the other side of the city, at the time when he rightly concluded Mary Blair's straining eyes were piercing the darkness up towards that side window through which her husband was effecting his escape.

The contents of the cheese proved trustworthy, so did the iron ring in the floor, and two hours before midnight Mary and William Blair were out of Edinburgh, on the road towards their own home. On and on they fled, as those flee who win life and liberty and happiness by flight.

But the flight itself had to be managed prudently. Ere the faintest glimmer of dawn appeared husband and wife had to hide themselves like hunted animals in the frost-bound holes of the earth. And there they had to lie, the livelong day, until the thick veil of night allowed them courage to crawl forth once more, well-nigh frozen to death, and to pursue their way.

Far and wide search was made for the escaped prize, but not again in the direction of his own home. "He would never be so foolhardy as to go there now," decided his enemies. And Mary, trusting that this would be the mode of reasoning, led her husband there in safety, and hid him in the room in the wall within which the eloquent James Guthrie had found refuge for a few days, six years before.

William Blair was sheltered there for many months, until the hottest fierceness of this especial wave of fiery persecution had burnt itself out; until "the authorities were becoming tired of their cruel work;" until "a relenting, or a more cautious and considerate spirit had found its way into the administration. Scotland was affected at that juncture by English politics. The Court was disheartened by the disgraces of the war with Holland, and the Prelatic party in Scotland lost a friend by the fall of Clarendon."

There was misery enough still inflicted upon the persecuted race. "From Dalziel downwards, through a crowd of rapacious officers of the local courts, men held gifts of forfeitures or of fines which it was their interest to exact by form of law. It was a sort of license to pillage the helpless enemy in the courts of law."

But yet, bad as matters thus continued, there was this improvement, that men no longer went in such absolute and constant terror of their lives as they had done for those past bloodthirsty months; and Mary Blair still had the unspeakable happiness of having her husband spared to her, and in all the fulness of restored health and vigour, although they had to find another and a more meagre home.

But how about Ivie McCall and his mother?





CHAPTER XXXIV.

ELSPETH SPENCE SPEAKS HER MIND.

OUGH-tongued and rough-tempered, but

with a heart that Mistress McCall began to believe must have been even singularly tender in girlhood's days, before unknown troubles had given it an outer bitter case of hardness. Elspeth Spence I am writing of, as you no doubt guess, and what Ivie's mother would have done without her at this juncture it is impossible to say. Personally she dared take no step to aid her son, or to hold communion with him. Indeed, it would of course have been a simple act of madness to make any such attempt, seeing that the closest watch had been set to discover her own hiding-place, in order to her own seizure and imprisonment. While she was free there was at least some reason to hope that fear of her future appeal to the Bishop of Dunblane might, to a certain degree, restrain the cruel proceedings of her boy's tormentors; but were they once able to secure her also, both would be completely at the mercy of their unjust and malicious judges,

In this state of affairs old Elspeth Spence proved invaluable. Even her volubility she learnt to restrain in the presence of the meek and sorrow-stricken face of the widow. Perhaps she made herself amends out of doors, however, for her forbearance within; certainly her blustering tongue and her blustering manners got even better known than of old in the streets and wynds of Edinburgh, and within the very halls of justice besides.

"Hech, then, are ye na feared to gang on that gate?" exclaimed a man one day in mingled warning and surprise, as she was proclaiming, in no measured terms, her opinion of men and things in general, and of some men in particular. But he soon got his answer.

Lean yellow arms akimbo, neck stretched forward till the head above it was level with the shoulders, and sparks of eyes glinting through mere slits in the face, she echoed the word "Fear!" with an accent o utter scorn that scarcely any man of modern times, however brave, could hope to emulate. "What should I fear, mon? The worst the servants o' the evil one can do is ta burrn me for a witch. Let them do't an' they will. They'll no find auld Elspeth gi'e them ony trouble to catch her."

The daring challenge was spoken like most of her speeches at the top pitch of her screeching voice, and there fell a hush of awed admiration upon her wide circle of auditors. But the hush was short, although the awe deepened as the indomitable old woman again broke the silence, herself and her voice seeming to

have undergone a transformation in the brief interval. She had drawn herself up to the full height of her tall, gaunt figure, her eyes were wide, her long arms folded across her breast, and there was a depth and solemnity in her tones the more striking from the unexpectedness.

"Fear!" she repeated again, in a way that thrilled to the heart of every hearer as she cast her searching glance slowly round: "Fear, do you say! I say unto you, be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear. Fear Him, which, after He hath killed, hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, fear Him!"

Again she paused, and again she looked slowly round upon the crowd. "Hech, men!" she continued, with somewhat more of her customary manner, 'when ance ye ha' getten that lesson right hame to your very hairrt o' hairrts, ye ken weel eneuch what it is to feel scorn for the biggest o' mortal man's power, wi' the wee bit limits putten ontil it by the will o' Him wha is Almighty."

She was right there, and in her assertion lay the secret not only of the strength of many of the noblest of the Covenanters, but of the martyrs for conscience' sake throughout all ages. The greater fear must cast out the lesser one.

However, few enough of the Edinburgh crowd were freer then than the generality of folks are now, from a very lively terror of their fellow-men; and at this moment there was a hasty dispersal of Elspeth Spence's companions as two well-known forms were seen advancing with haughty mien along the street.

Archbishop Sharp and General Dalziel. The Archbishop's countenance was noteworthy for its supercilious pride, as he moved forward looking neither to the right nor left, the mean rabble of his fellow-creatures quite beneath his lofty notice, unless when he was ordering their punishment.

The costly attire of the Archbishop was in strong contrast to the tight, straight jockey-coat, the altogether almost comic simplicity of his companion's appearance. In equal contrast was the manner of the two autocrats. The General's quick, light-blue orbs were turned here and there and everywhere with nearly every step he took.

"Disperse that mob!" he shouted, as he came in sight of old Elspeth's gathering.

But the soldiers were spared the trouble of obedience, for before the words were well out of his mouth the people had dispersed themselves, down every alley and deep doorway that offered them the quickest hiding-place. Only the old woman stood her ground. Her boast of fearlessness had been no piece of vain braggadocio. Stretching out a lean forefinger towards the one—James Sharp—she cried:

"See, men and angels, you goes the renegade, the perjurer."

"Silence, old hag!" shouted General Dalziel.

"Get you gone, or I'll have you burnt for the hideous old witch you are."

"Ah—ha!" she laughed shrilly. "I reckon 'at ye will when the Lord permits. I know ye, Thomas Dalziel, and the Father o' all blackness knows ye better. I doobt na' ye'll burrn me, ye Muscovy beast, as ye ha' roasted men before."

At that scathing speech the General burst into a furious imprecation, dashed forward from the Prelate's side, and snatching his sword from the scabbard he struck her so passionately upon the mouth with its hilt that the blood streamed down.

"Verily, this is a brave, braw mon's wark," she said coolly, as she fixed her eyes upon his for a moment, and then let them fall again upon the crimson stains, dying the white neckerchief which she wore folded across her chest.

"Hech!" she continued with her cold, sneering tones, "this is a grand fine deed ye ha' dune. Ye are a mon and a soldier, wha make your boast o' a mon's honour, an' a soldier's honour! And ye ha' stricken a woman, one moreover wha is auld, wi' ane foot i' the grave for age and spare dieting. Will ye no strike me again? Ye had better to. Ye know I am no able to defend mysel', nor to gie ye your buffets back again."

Dr. James Sharp had come up by this time, and he now turned imperiously to his companion—as though impatient of the undignified, disagreeable scene.

"General, let me give orders to your guard to take the old beldam into custody." But Dalziel had recovered himself by this time, and regained his usual self-possession. "No, no," he said hastily with a deepened tinge in his bronzed cheeks. "No, no. Let us pass on, and get out of sight and hearing of the wretched hag at once, lest she tempt me to forget myself again. Take her into custody indeed! What are you thinking of, man? A fine handle we should give to the lampooners, if we let them get hold of a tale that we were frightened by a wretched old woman's spiteful tongue."

And so, one form of cowardice conquering another, Elspeth Spence was left yet for another space without further molestation, and she returned by a circuitous route to the present abiding-place of herself and Kate McCall. On reaching the door of the lady's apartment she paused without, a few moments, listening. Once she had awakened her, by her careless entrance, out of the brief respite from sorrow of a deep sleep, and she had taken double heed to her movements ever since.

Hearing no sound within she softly entered, and found the occupant on her knees, her face buried in her hands, her spirit too absorbed in prayer to be awake to externals. More than three weeks had passed since she had stood in the Council Chamber, as witness to the agonies inflicted upon her son. During all that time she had not once dared to try to see him. Had it not been for old Elspeth's ingenious questionings she would not have known even so much as whether he were yet alive. She would have had

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nothing to encourage her to persevere in her own concealment, or to maintain her hope.

"But we have a friend," declared the old woman to her again and again when she grew most despondent. "He has done the best o' good services to the Blairs, and he is still more ready to gi'e help to ye and to yon bairn Ivie. Be ye not faithless, but believing in the God o' all mercy. And be patient yet a wee while langer."

This patience for yet a little while longer she had been anxiously, although somewhat unnecessarily, urging by way of implied comfort, just before she had gone out to meet her late encounter. But to tell the truth, her own patience was fast waning, and she had learnt news out of doors that had almost crushed out her hopes too, as far as earthly happiness was concerned, for these new objects of her affectionate interest.

Ivie McCall was so far recovered from his late bar-barous treatment as to be able to sit up for half-an-hour or so at a time. Flemming had passed her in the street, sauntering along as though unconscious of her neighbourhood, and he had muttered to her, in passing, these significant tidings. A few days more and the lad would doubtless be well enough to be put to the torture again—or—strong enough to be put to death.

It was these reflections that had roused her to the especial spiritedness of her invectives against the present laws and their administrators, and it may be pretty safely declared that if she had been really the witch some folks believed her, and endowed with supernatural powers, she would have indulged in a spice of persecuting malice in her turn. She did go so far, more than once, as to ponder over in her mind what form her punishment of the persecutors should take. They should be mice with no holes to run to, and she would be the typical black cat. Or they should be toads and she the fork-tongued snake waiting to swallow them. Or,-and this thought pleased her wrathful fancy most-

James Sharp should be a captive bound hand and foot, and she should be armed with a sharp, twoedged sword to slay him. And he should crawl, grovelling on the ground, to her feet to implore, to crave, to cringe for mercy. And she would show him none. She little thought how near the picture, drawn by her revengeful imagination, came to a future truth.

Meanwhile she returned to Kate McCall, the widow with an only son, and her dreams of supposititious powers faded, leaving her with the full consciousness of herself as a helpless old woman in the presence of a gigantic sorrow.

"But the Lord is Almighty," she murmured, not in the tone with which she had addressed the mob a while since, but almost as though her words were a questioning petition. They roused Kate McCall. Lifting her bent head she answered in the same low, gentle tones as of old:

"Yes, dear Elspeth, He is Almighty and all-merciful. It would be no help to me to doubt that, no consolation to fear that there is none to whom I may cry—'Deliver my darling, my only one, from the power of the lions.'"

"But how if He does not deliver him?"

The question burst from Elspeth's mouth almost against her will it seemed. In the presence of unbelief or impiety her own faith glowed with a steady flame. But in presence of this sorely-tried but unshaken faith of Ivie's mother she had now and again, of late, felt impatient misgivings as to the perfect love of One, who could allow His children to be so sorely afflicted. Or—if the love were perfect, then could the power be so? For herself, personally, she could see through the utmost that man's malignity could accomplish, to the Home beyond, but when she contemplated the sufferings of these two hapless beings, for whom her old rough heart had grown soft again, a thick veil rose, for her, between her sight and Heaven, and she felt well-nigh blind.

"But how if He does not deliver him?" she repeated almost fiercely, as if she were half-indignant with the trustfulness. "How will you say then, Mistress McCall?"

The younger woman lifted the Bible that lay upon the chair at which she had been kneeling. It was open, and the traces of tears were upon the page, but the voice was clear and steady that read out an answer already taken home to the reader's soul. "'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?'" As it is written, "'For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature—'"

"Do ye mark that, dear Elspeth, the whole fulness of the assurance that the Lord's inspired apostle gies us: 'For I am persuaded not any creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.'"

She bowed her head over the precious words, and again tears fell upon the page; but this time they were tears of gratitude.

"Elspeth," said the low, sweet voice, "you see, my darling is delivered from the lions. It is no matter of doubt, any longer. No more a matter of question, whether the Lord will deliver him or no. He hath accepted the Lamb, who died to deliver us for his Saviour, and I am henceforth persuaded that nothing shall be able to separate him from the Rock of Ages—from the love of God."

Sorrow had turned the beautiful sunny-hued, bright hair silver-white; but the promise of God stood sure, for all that. "My grace is sufficient for thee, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."



CHAPTER XXXV.

THREE TAPS AT THE DOOR.

F was not for some hour or more after Elspeth Spence had returned to the friendly shelter of the old house that Kate McCall asked her if she had learnt any

news out of doors. And when she did put the question it was some minutes before she received any answer. A deep, long-drawn sigh at last proved more persuasive than words had done. Elspeth dropped the wooden spoon into her basin of porridge and grunted out with pretended ungraciousness:

"Ye may ha' trust enough in the Lord, but ye ha' sma' trust in me. Had I had news to gie, think ye as I wad na ha' gied it?"

Mistress McCall's hand went with a quick pressure over her heart as she replied: "At any rate I understand that you had no good news to give. But I would fain hear even the worst you have learnt. Does my child still live?"

"Better were it if he did na," ejaculated the old woman. "He is no only alive but he is fast gather-

ing back his braw young strength again, I am telt. And if nane come to help before the morrow morn he is to be haled before the Judges again, put to the question again, and, if he still keeps a silent tongue in's heid, he is to be forthwith hangit. Ye know all now, and enough!"

"My brother!" moaned the poor young mother.
"Surely he is well enough by this, to give us help?"

Elspeth Spence shook her head. "My messenger has just returned. The Bishop is still in's chamber wi' a heavy, racking cough upon him, and surrounded by those who let nane coom anigh him but such as please themsels. It is no in that direction ye maun seek for help."

There was another low, deep sigh. "Your messenger with the flask. Has he had time, as yet, to fulfil his errand?"

Elspeth scowled. "Ah! the villain. Time, and to spare would he ha' had if Elspeth Spence had been at his heels on his road. I warrant ye he has been drinking, an' feasting, an' sleeping, on's journey, as if 'twere a marriage message for anither he was gane aboot, an' no ane o' life and death for one worth a hundred o' his worthless self."

It was the more generous of Elspeth to speak so, seeing that the "worthless self," was her own cousin, who had not only gone on this troublesome and dangerous journey, but through whose hospitality, and secret warmth for "the Cause," they enjoyed their present shelter. But you know Elspeth always

did avail herself of a relation's privilege to speak as she chose of her belongings. Some ill-natured folks said that she had done so, with regard to her husband, so freely that he had really died a year after marriage of nothing but the vain attempt to live down her avowed bad opinion of him.

Certainly, he did happen to have an ague-fever too, but every one who knew his wife regarded that as quite an insignificant matter in comparison with the other. As for her cousin-messenger, to whom she had entrusted the precious vase, it was next door to an impossibility for him to have got to London and back in the time that had elapsed since she bid him God-speed on his journey.

At least-well-you know I only said "next door to an impossibility," not one altogether to be insurmountable by an individual endowed with special energy, vigour, and determination. I am glad I did not say "quite an impossibility," for even as Elspeth finished speaking, and Mistress McCall sank down upon her knees again, in prayer to the all-powerful Father of the powerless, there came three distinct single taps upon the floor just without their apartment. A low cry burst simultaneously from their lips. They darted towards the door, and for some moments stood there staring at it, and clutching at each other's hands. Were these three taps accidental, or were they the sign agreed upon? They dared not let themselves hope, for the disappointment would be so terrible.

As they thus waited, breathless, speechless, still but for trembling, the three taps came again, nearer to the door this time, quite close outside. So close that they could hear the breathing of the one who gave them:

"Speak — answer him," gasped Kate McCall hoarsely.

"I—I canna!" gasped back Elspeth. "It's no preceesely like my cousin's tappings."

And neither was it "precessely" her cousin who gave them. Perhaps the sound of her voice had penetrated to the corridor, or perhaps whoever it was who waited outside had grown tired of waiting. The latch of the door was pressed, the door opened, and the first thing that met Mistress McCall's eyes was the well-known Venice flask. Her breath came back to her then, and she fell to sobbing, with a great flood of tears raining from her eyes.

Not the Venice flask only was there, but the giver of it also, himself, travel-worn, and rather haggard-looking with his long, hurried journey, but upright as ever, with all his grand breadth and height, and with the same expression of frank kindness and resolution in his eyes by which he so easily won the confidence of all those with whom he came in contact.

In five minutes the two women knew all the most important items of the information he was there to give them. Carrying out his constantly adopted policy of keeping himself in the background, in all his favourable efforts on behalf of the Covenanters, he

had entrusted it to the cautious and skilful management of his foster-mother's cousin, to deliver the King's pardon for Ivie to the proper authorities, and himself had hastened on to bear the glad tidings instantly to the mother.

Obeying natural impulse she was for flying out at once, to go and meet her boy as he should come forth from the prison-doors. Fortunately her companions had calmer heads upon their shoulders just then than she had, and they kept her safe in her hiding-place.

"I have brought no free pardon for you, unhappily, for your having sheltered one of the rebels," said Henry Savile. "It was not until we were already more than a day's journey from London that I learnt you were in any peril, and then I dared not lose time by going back."

"It is weel, verily, that ye did na so," broke in Elspeth.

"So I have discovered within this half-hour," replied Savile. "But it would be small satisfaction to Ivie McCall to find, on coming out of prison, that he had but made way for his mother to take his place in the dungeon. At least let us endeavour that you may keep your freedom until you shall have had the happiness to meet once more."

"Please God," murmured Kate McCall, with the old tight clasp of the almost transparent hands. "But when, think you, they will be merciful enough to let him forth from his captivity?"

"For the mercy," was the bitter-toned reply, "I

can say nought. But the King's order is for the lad's instant release, and however they may strain and distort laws to their own ends, they dare not disobey an express command. Another hour, or at the most two, should see him here in your arms."

The mother stretched them out unconsciously as he spoke, with a scarcely-suppressed cry. As she became aware of her act a faint colour fluttered into the pale, thin cheeks, and she murmured in timid accents of apology:

"Ah! sir, pardon my foolish impatience. Since I know that the Lord hath hearkened to my prayers, and attended to the voice of my supplications, even to the granting me joy in this world, my heart seemeth to be set free to ache with longing to behold my child's face again, as it hath not ached before."

"Would that I had power to shorten the minutes of its aching!" was the earnest reply.

And, scarcely better able to keep down his rising impatience than the mother herself, he soon after quitted the apartment to take up his watch outside the house. He left his promise with the two women that he would return so soon as Elspeth's cousin and the boy appeared in sight.

Had he stayed for that to come to pass their suspense would have endured beyond their strength to bear. Hidden within the long, dark passage of a Scotch entrance Savile had watched the corner of the street for more than an hour, when at last an angry exclamation broke from his lips and he stamped his foot.

"What have you done with the lad?" he asked sharply as he was joined by the man who had been the companion of his long journey. "Where have you left him?"

"In the same place where he was thrown with a crushed leg nigh a month ago," was the gloomy reply. "I doobt, my maister, there'll be foul play intended to you puir bairn, Ivie McCall, for all you ha' dune to rescue him fra the hands o' the Philistines."

"But His Majesty's free pardon," exclaimed the Englishman. "Where is that?"

"In the honds o' him wha has made a compact wi' the Evil One," replied Sandy in the same heavy tones. "Him wha was a Covenanter, but wha now ca's himsel' an Archbishop. He took the bit paper. I was glad to gie it to him, hoping to see him look fashed-like an' disappointed—he did so for a wee meenute, but then—"

The man paused, almost with a groan, of mingled anger and despair. His companion regarded him with the deepest anxiety, as he urged him to proceed. "But what then? Hath the pardon become a dead letter?—Hath he already caused the murder of the boy, think you?"

"Soon will have done so," was the low, significant answer, "if we have nought to trust to but the King's pardon. When you James Sharp had read it once, or mebbe the three times through, a glint shot into

his een, and he lukkit at me keenlike, and then spake in a girding tone to one beside him—'Ah!' he said, 'Our Most Gracious Majesty hath been pleased to send to us here a free pardon, for one Ivie McCann, a young lad of that pestilent set of wild Covenanting rebels. We have nane by that name now in our chaairge, and so the pardon is nought."

"'The pardon is for Ivie McCall!' I cried. And he glowered at me wi's evil een. 'Do you think to contradict the King?' he said. 'His Majesty hath writ here a pardon for ane, Ivie McCann, and for you Ivie McCall, would you win one for him likewise ye had need to hire the wind to travel by, for he dies the morn.' And he hasted on to the castle to gie the order, belike."

Strong man as Henry Savile was, the light seemed to fade from before his sight, and for some moments he felt as though his reason was in danger. How go back to that young yet white-haired mother within there, and tell her that the hope, with which he had broken down her sustaining force of resignation, was a mocking one. He almost wished that the sensation of numbness with which he was overpowered might be the presage of death, so thankfully would he have been spared being a witness of her sorrow. But a soft "Hist!" beside him brought him back to consciousness.

A dragoon had hastily slipped into the dark entry, in a way that seemed to signify a wish to avoid observation by those without, and there was equal

caution in his whisper to the man, Sandy Fraser. He evidently did not see his own countryman as he muttered quickly to the other:

"Hark ye then, and pluck up your wits. I am a friend to yon poor brave boy they have a mind to make away with. I have followed you, to tell you that the guard is changed at ten at night, and the keys change hands at the same time. One or two of the guards are strangers here."

With this somewhat meagre aid and information the man was about to slip out into the street again, but a detaining hand came down upon his shoulder from an unexpected side.

"Hold, Flemming," said a firm low voice. "And do not shake and shiver like a frightened girl. You have told me welcome news. Help us to rescue that lad to-night, and you shall go to England with me next week, and have a recommendation to the service of the King, himself. I have favour enough with your commander to win you from his company."

Flemming no sooner recognized the voice than he regained his self-possession. "If you will keep me in your own service, Sir Henry, I will do all I dare. But, an' you will let me leave this suspected neighbourhood now, and come to me openly but alone, anigh Holyrood Palace an hour hence, we can discuss all plans, and draw no suspicion on us either."

This plea seemed so reasonable, as well as prudent, that Savile at once agreed to the proposition, and as Flemming stole away the travellers mounted with renewed hope to the pair of women so anxiously awaiting them. A few words together on the way up arranged what was to be said, and although Mistress McCall felt a pang of disappointment when they appeared without her son, the tranquillity of their countenances forbid her to suffer any fresh misgivings. She found it perfectly natural moreover that her friends should judge it expedient for her and Ivie to meet outside Edinburgh, and after such delay as should tend to baffle spies hoping to discover the mother by means of the son.

Happily for the lady no one had in any way thought to associate her with Elspeth Spence, and when the old woman left Edinburgh on the road to Leith that afternoon, accompanied by a tatterdemalion-looking fishwife, the younger woman received many a jeering piece of advice to part company again with the old witch, whose stormy temper would turn her fish bad before she had time to sell it, and whose tongue would talk her head off.

Three or four miles from the city Mistress McCall stopped and looked back. Her heart began to sink within her. She was leaving her boy, forsaking him she almost felt, and perhaps—such things had been—perhaps she was being tricked into providing for her own safety by false assurances.

As that doubt entered her mind she suddenly faced round, and took half-a-dozen steps on the return road. Elspeth stared at her for a few seconds in amaze, and then making a tolerably shrewd guess at the real state

of the case she moved as suddenly as her companion had done. Snatched up the frail, slight figure in her muscular old arms, bore it back to the spot just left, set it down again, then stamped at it and railed at it, for its mad foolishness, in a simulated fury that completely terrified Mistress McCall into passive obedience to a wild will which she found herself utterly unable to resist.

As the night came on, and she sank down at last, overpowered with fatigue, Elspeth Spence condescended to unbend once more from her austerity, and while doing all that lay in her power for her companion's bodily comfort she consoled her mind also, with assurances that it was certainly best for Ivie, as well as for herself, that she should thus have left the city. Meantime, just at that precise hour bad was the best, as the saying is, for Ivie McCall. He was being put to moral torture if not physical. That free pardon may or may not have borne his own name spelt properly. That was a matter to lie upon James Sharp's conscience to the day of his death. Two people at any rate declared that the name in the suppressed pardon was correctly spelt. But however that might be, the Archbishop had no real shadow of a doubt, all men knew, for whom it was intended, and the discovery that the boy had other friends powerful enough to obtain it for him, besides the Bishop of Dunblane, warned him that he must act quickly if he would secure full revenge for the boy's fearless words of rebuke.

A mean, cowardly revenge it would be at the best, but he added a heightening touch to it. He paid Ivie a visit in his cell, and tried by renewed threats to extort desired information from him as to some of the hiding-places of the persecuted brethren. But lingering weeks of pain and suspense had not broken Ivie's spirit, and although he had an intense, almost a sick, craving to see his mother once more before he died, even that longing he could forego sooner than faithfulness and his honour.

"You have forgotten the words of our Covenant,' he said, "but I have not. You and I have both sworn to stand by true Covenanters, and to aid them and support them even to our life's extremity. We have sworn this by the great name of the Lord our God, and I dare not break my vow."

"And I," said the Archbishop with tones of suppressed passion; "and I, by the same name, swear that you shall die ere this hour to-morrow, and neither will I dare to break that vow."

Unsuspected ears heard those impious words by which the God of infinite justice and mercy was called upon as a witness to so base an oath, and a stern grave smile rested upon an unseen face. For purposes of State espionage a little chamber had once been artfully contrived in the wall of the room that had been James Guthrie's cell the days before his execution, and which was now that of Ivie McCall. It was entered from within a chimney, and a secret spring in the interior gave admittance to the cell.

Lounging about the castle in a desultory fashion some years ago, Henry Savile had made this interesting discovery, and finding himself to be the sole possessor of a forgotten secret he kept it for possible future use. By means of it the minister would have been saved, had he not refused to make a false declaration to the sentinel who would have had to be passed outside. In the present instance any such difficulties were obviated by Flemming's co-operation. Besides, very fortunately for himself and his friends at this juncture, Ivie was small and emaciated, and consequently light and weak.

The plans were well made and well carried through. At ten at night the guard was changed. At one spot there was a sudden hubbub. The guards' lanterns were extinguished. There were sounds as of men shouting with drunken laughter, and high above all, after a minute or two, could be distinguished the voice of the well-known clever and active dragoon, Flemming, shouting in stentorian and most solemn tones for aid to secure a spirit, a hobgoblin, an emissary from Satan himself.

When his comrades surrounded him, and lights were brought, he presented a pitiable-looking spectacle. Face and hands scratched and bleeding, clothes torn, hair seemingly well-nigh clawed out of his head.

"But what of all that?" he exclaimed, turning upon his wondering companions as though in towering indignation at their dilatoriness. "It's not my injuries I am thinking of, but the disgrace to the Service. I kept hold of the wriggling thing as long as ever I could, but it twisted out of my grasp at last, and where it has gone I don't know."

"Where did it come from?" asked the officer in command.

"From the lower regions in the first instance, I should say," was the sullen-voiced answer. "But down from you window just now, with a straight pounce upon my head."

And he put up his hand and rubbed his head, as though he still felt the terrifying incubus there of which he spoke. And the whole of his companions, officer and all, stared up at the window and into the air, and on to his head, and from head to foot of their dishevelled comrade, with open-mouthed, aghast credulity not badly matched by some of the beliefs of the wiseacres of this nineteenth century.

Meantime, while Flemming was telling his marvel-lous tale, two men, with a lame boy between them, were hurrying away from the castle as fast as the knowledge that a life hung upon their movements could urge their feet to go. Those who had put the lights out at Sandy Fraser's instigation made an easy escape, owing to the guard being strangers to the locality, and to the kind of people they had to deal with. The thickness of the night had also been an aid. Indeed everything had appeared to combine to save Ivie McCall, at this twelfth hour, from a cruel death.

A week later Henry Savile contrived to send him

over to Ireland disguised as a fisher-boy, Mistress McCall going with her son in the costume that had aided her own escape from the persecuting enemies. Old Elspeth was invited to go with them, but she stoutly refused to be driven, as she phrased it, "by fause-hearted renegades and loons fra her ain braw native land."

Ivie would fain have said the same, and acted upon the saying too, as resolutely as the old woman, but fortunately for his mother's peace of mind, and for his own future usefulness to his fellow-creatures, his injuries rendered him utterly helpless in the hands of those who had taken upon themselves the present charge of him.

The necessary haste and roughness of his rescue from Edinburgh Castle had brought back a fresh attack of inflammation in the tortured leg, and for some time there appeared every probability that he would have to lose it. But perfect rest and tranquillity, and his mother's untiring loving care, helped his vigorous constitution to fight through this peril, and after nearly a year of helplessness in a strange land he began to move about again.

About that time the incessant traveller, Henry Savile, paid his *protégés* a visit. He found some difficulty in recognizing Ivie, who was no longer a small boy in appearance, but almost as tall as himself.

"Well!" he exclaimed in amazement, "who would have supposed that any one could be so altered in a twelvementh? Lucky for you, friend Ivie, that you

were not a lanky fellow like this when I smuggled you out of the castle that night, or even Flemming dared not have been so blind as not to see you, perchance."

Kate McCall's hands went together in their fervent clasp as those past dread memories were recalled, while Ivie asked what had become of the soldier, who had contrived to show him many merciful acts of kindness during his suffering inprisonment.

Sir Henry Savile smiled. "The brave dragoon hath adopted a new profession. From that night he feigned to have his brain turned, ever pressing his hand upon his head declaring he felt a weight there. Certainly he did,—the weight of his own hand. But the authorities believed him to have been stricken there, by the one who had contrived your release. And considering that he was henceforth likely to be somewhat worse than useless they readily enough turned him adrift. He groweth strawberries now, for a sister I have living far away south, in Sussex."

And to that far-away southern county of England Savile took Ivie McCall and his mother three years later, once again to be with their relative, the learned Divine and good Christian, Robert Leighton.

From Dunblane the pious Bishop was translated to the Diocese of Glasgow, but finding himself increasingly unable to stem the tide of cruelty and injustice, and almost broken-hearted with the misery and wrongdoing with which he was surrounded, he finally resigned all his ecclesiastical dignities in Scotland, in 1669 and went into retirement in Sussex. There he ended

his days, and his gentle, like-natured sister, the widow Kate McCall, also. But there was to come more stir into the mortal life of Ivie, before he entered into his eternal rest.

Ere however we arrive at the events which, after the lapse of many years, drew him once more northwards from his English home, there is one tragic occurrence which the course of our tale demands should be narrated. One man's name has been so perpetually interwoven with those of our characters that this history would be altogether incomplete without the description of the awful end of the life of the traitor renegade, James Sharp.

But let me break the thread of my tale for one minute here. Indeed I feel that I must, for I have something so strongly on my mind to say, that if I did compel my pen to run on past it, my mental eyes would be looking back at it all the time, as my bodily eyes used to do at ripe blackberries in the hedges, when folks made me walk on past them.

I want to say this to you—If, at any time in your lives, and about anything, you change your opinion, never be ashamed or afraid to say so. You will be a terrible coward if you don't, and dishonourable. Every principle of truth and honour demands the confession of you. It is simple rubbish to libel a person as a "turncoat" on account of his avowal of a change of principles or opinions. People should be ashamed to be guilty of such foolishness. Why, according to their argument, the heathens of old had no right to

give up bowing down to wood and stone, and to embrace Christianity. However clearly they might see their old faith to be vain and foolish, and their new belief pure and holy, they should not speak out, they should keep their altered opinions to themselves.

You feel almost angry at the idea of any one saying such a thing as that to the converts to Christianity, do you not?

And for my part, I feel quite angry with the thought. But then I feel angry with people casting blame and injurious words upon others for any change of opinion. Such change is no affair of idle choice, if it be an honest one, and of course I am concerned with no other. It is scarcely optional at all. If a body believes his first coat to be worn out and worthless, he naturally is led to change it for another, And at all events, he is a change coat, not a turncoat. But—

Yes, there is a "But." There are some turncoats. Some miserable creatures who have worn their opinions, their principles, openly and on the outside, so long as it was safe and pleasant to do so, but who turn them inside, or rather wear them only inside, covering up the outer show, when annoyance and trouble on the one hand, and comfort and advantage on the other, lead—not to the real inner change which ought to be declared if it take place, but to a choice of professions by word and act that offer the greatest promise of worldly good.

When you feel tempted to change your opinions, be

very, very careful to examine yourself whether it be pleasure, ease, fashion, self-interest, ambition, or any such earthly matter that is counselling the change, or the reasonings of an honest conscience.

Robert Leighton and James Sharp both gave up the Covenant and Presbyterianism, and both became bishops under the Episcopalian form of Church government. The same deeds on the surface, but even in his own day Covenanters forgave Robert Leighton the change, and yielded him their love and respect, and he has left an honourable name behind him, for the admiration of future generations of the great family of Christians of all denominations. But as for James Sharp, not even the pity extorted by his horrible death blinds any eyes even for a moment to the despicableness of his character and conduct.

Only think if the proud ecclesiastic could have foretold that even you and I, individuals he would have considered quite beneath any other notice from him than a sneer or a scowl, would feel a kind of irresistible loathing contempt for him!

As I said ever so many pages back, surely many people's actions would be very different if only they knew in what fashion they, and their doings, would be discussed in the future. Still, with all his lack of claim upon brotherly sympathy, I do wish for James Sharp's own sake, for his poor daughter's sake, and yet more for the sake of the fair name of the Covenanters, that his end had not been such as you will learn in our next chapter.



CHAPTER XXXVI.

NOT THE MIND OF CHRIST.

HEN we last saw Birsy, the cobbler by trade, and the spy by profession, he was shaking with fear in a dark cupboard of a room in Sandy Fraser's house. Various circumstances had drawn suspicion to that abode, but happily no search was instituted until Mistress McCall was safe in Ireland, and Flemming had done a final good turn to the Covenanters, before travelling with Savile to England, by giving Sandy himself a timely warning to give a wide berth to his own home.

The only human being the dragoons found, throughout the nine stories of the gloomy dwelling, was Birsy, and such a grim, savage-looking object he was that he narrowly escaped being locked in again, as something superhuman, and left to starve to death. Fortunately for him, however, he had not become so scared out of his wits as to lose all presence of mind at this critical moment, and a wild appeal to the absent Archbishop induced the soldiers to let the wretched little tool of oppression go free.

The first use he made of his liberty was to denounce Elspeth as his kidnapper. But his malice missed its aim in that quarter. The old woman found work to do amongst her fugitive brethren far from her known haunts, and when she was traced at last even her enemies stood awed in the presence of the cold, stiff body lying in such solemn repose upon the bed of death.

In another quarter Birsy was baffled. Nowhere could James MacMichael be found. The spy surpassed himself in cunning in his efforts to discover the stern and moody-natured Covenanter. Parties of dragoons repeatedly swept across the country in every direction, in vain search for the man whose fierce spirit was said to have much to do with keeping up the indomitable resolution of his countrymen.

The cobbler would have comforted himself with the belief that his avowed antagonist was dead, had it been possible. But by all manner of startling and bewildering means the undiscoverable MacMichael contrived to deliver terrible warnings to Birsy, to the effect that the threatened day of reckoning was not forgotten, but only delayed. Under these circumstances it was no use trying to suppose him dead. He was all too evidently alive, and Birsy's own life was, in consequence, such a mere long drawn out torment of terror that he sometimes felt inclined to pray MacMichael to satisfy his vengeance at once by ending it.

Perhaps the Covenanter understood the nature of

the man he had to do with well enough to comprehend all this, and to feel better satisfied, on account of his brother's betrayal, by letting things take their present course, than if he had life for life. But however that may be, Birsy still lived, and James MacMichael still lived, on the last day of April, 1679.

James Sharp also still lived on that day, but it were as well that he should put his house in order, for a hundred hours pass quickly, and they were all of time now left to him. Perpetual persecutions, and the wild hunted life that many of the Covenanters had led for many years, had wrought in some of them a spirit of fanaticism as dark and gloomy as their fellow-men had rendered their existences. They lost sight of the Spirit of the Gospel; they forgot that the fruit of the Spirit is:

"Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance."

Poor creatures!—perhaps they supposed that their long-suffering had been such an actual fact as to shut out all the rest. But I cannot tell you how thankful I should be if this sin of the murder of the Archbishop did not lie at their door. James Sharp was a blood-thirsty and deceitful man, dishonest, unjust, and rapacious, and he did not deserve to live out his days.

But he was in God's hands. This little company of plotting Covenanters forgot that, in reality, although they made a great surface talk about its being so. They let go of their hold upon love, and let hate fill its place. They let go of peace, and feverish restlessness gained possession of them instead. And so they lost hold of that perfect faith in God which knows, without any shadow of doubt, that God can work His own purposes without any shadow of man's wrong-doing to help Him.

But the Archbishop was not the man at whom their especial wrath was directed, at that especial springtime of 1679, although it came to pass that he was the one to suffer the utmost of its consequences.

"A certain William Carmichael, sheriff-substitute, or Commissioner from the Council, was the object of antipathy. There was a meeting of Fifeshire peasants on the 8th of April, to which Hackston of Rathillet was summoned, as a person of some rank having sympathy with them.

"After prayer, he said: 'Ye have sent for me, and I desire to know the cause?"

"Whereupon Robert Henderson and Alexander Balfour answered, that the cause of sending for him and the calling of the meeting was to consult anent the condition of the shire, the Gospel being quite extinguished out of it, the hearts of many like to wax faint anent the keeping-up of the same, through the terror and cruel oppression of William Carmichael. And it was resolved to take some course with him to scare him from his cruel courses."

James MacMichael broke in upon the explanation with a voice no whit mellowed yet by age or wanderings. "Aye," he exclaimed harshly—"and wherever we find him, tak' ye heed that the scare we gie un be to a good purpose."

"But what and if we find him in the palace of the Archbishop of St. Andrew's?" asked William Blair. "It is maist likely. For like ither birds o' a feather they are flock thegither. Where t' ane is t' ither is nane far off."

For a few moments no one spoke. Then several voices exclaimed together, led by MacMichael's: "In that case it will e'en be to tak' baith, and to hang baith over the port—especially the bishop, it being by many of the Lord's people and ministers judged a duty long since not to suffer such a person to live, who had shed and was shedding so much of the blood of the saints."

William Blair shook his head at this outburst. Using the utmost endeavours to scare men from their evil courses was one thing, but slaying them was another to which he, at any rate, did not see that the way lay clearly marked. One or two of the company shared his doubts for a time, and so we are told that several more meetings were held, "for seeking the Lord's mind further in the matter."

We may be very sure, however, from the result that they unhappily put their own minds first. The lives and deeds of Jesus Christ and his Apostles, and their immediate successors, were given to us as priceless examples in all things for all ages. Never mind what it SEEMS to us it must be right should be done, or quite reasonable or quite excusable. Just look away from your own beliefs and surmises and suppositions, and see what Jesus Christ did, and those

to whom He, the one infallible Teacher, taught His lessons personally.

Jesus Christ did not suffer one of those who came out against him to receive so much injury as even the loss of his ear. "Herod the king stretched forth his hand to vex certain of the Church: and he killed James the brother of John with the sword." But the Apostles did not forthwith stir up the fierce human passions of the vexed Church, to wreak human vengeance on Herod the king. We hear of no secret societies of Christians formed to compass the destruction of Nero. We know of no meetings called to consult as to the assassination of Diocletian.

The early Christians used no such means as these to further the cause of the Church, or to aid themselves. How they would have stared, had any counselled measures so diametrically opposed to the law of Christ! They conquered the world, but it was by the surpassing eloquence of their love, their holiness, their unquenchable faith, and their martyrdom.

"This is the victory," you remember, "that overcometh the world, even our faith."

The early Christians held to faith, hope, and charity, and left the guardianship of themselves and their cause to God. It is a most dismal thing when any body of Christians falls into the extraordinary mistake that they can promote their Heavenly Father's honour, or forward the interests of their Church, by resorting to either judicial murders or secret assassinations.

The angels might easily have wept over this poor little handful of devoted, and in many respects noble-hearted, Covenanters, when they met together during those last days of April, and gradually discussed themselves up to the final conclusion that, in order to prevent "the Gospel being quite extinguished out of their shire," one man at any rate should be assassinated. In the deliberations Carmichael's was always the name mentioned.

On Wednesday, the 30th of April, "an arrangement was made to meet on Friday night, for taking some course with Carmichael on Saturday, if he could be gotten," and then one of the party was sent away to bring back with him a minister to hold a solemn conventicle on the Sabbath following.





CHAPTER XXXVII.

"BECAUSE YE HAVE BETRAYED THE CHURCH,
AS JUDAS."

RIDAY night, the second of May, and a sinister committee was assembled for final deliberation. There were thirteen of them in the first instance, and one of them, William Blair, they let go, on the advice of his friend

MacMichael, "not being clear to reveal to him what was designed."

Blair had learnt too much from his laird, Graham McCall, and too much, unconsciously, in the old days from the laird's young son, Ivie, not to see clearly a flaw in the reasoning that would make the act now in contemplation seem a right one. MacMichael had hinted at it to him some hours earlier in the day, and demanded fiercely:

"What would ye judge to be your duty if there were a wild and mad bull running up and down Scotland, killing and slaying all that were come in his way, man, wife, and bairn? Would you not

think it your duty to kill him, according to that Scripture, Exodus xxi. 28, 29?" *

Blair shook his head, as though to put aside such line of argument. "These men are wild enough, verily," he said, "and mad too ane body might well think. But yet they are not brute beasts, but men, and the Apostle hath said by the Spirit: 'See that none render evil for evil unto any man.' And again: 'Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written-Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord."

A dark, heavy scowl came upon the face of the gloomy fanatic. He condescended to make no reply in his own words. He lifted his Bible, and it fell open with a readiness at the required place, that was significant of long and frequent brooding over the passage which he read out with low, fierce tones:

"And Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord in Gilgal."

William Blair's answer was still less direct, perhaps, but it was drawn from the same holy volume: "Insomuch that if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect." "My friend," and he laid his hand earnestly on his companion's arm as he continued: "My brother in the Lord, there be many false Christs and false prophets now, rising hour by hour in our

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^{*} The real words, in reference afterwards to the King, spoken by one of the chief assassins. Vol. vii. 220, Hill Burton's 'History.'

hearts, and they are more powerful to deceive the elect than any that are without."

"Even so," was the stern, unyielding retort. "An' so tak' heed to yoursel', William Blair; fause prophets nourished in your ain heart, those o' cowardice, and fause pity and forbearance towards the servants o' him wha is the enemy o' the Lord an' His Christ will cast ye fra' grace into the pit o' blackness and despair."

James MacMichael was no hypocrite, seeking to hide a thirst for revenge under the cloak of religion. At the time he spoke he as thoroughly believed his view of the matter to be right as William Blair was convinced of the righteousness of his, and accordingly, lest faintheartedness, or scruples, should interfere materially with the matter in hand, MacMichael privately counselled the remaining eleven members of the Committee to dismiss Blair before their plans were brought to a distinct and matured head.

Blair was thankful enough at heart to be thus shut out from deliberations he could not approve, but human nature is weak, and, as he made his way slowly back through the darkness to his wife, he heaved many a deep and heavy sigh. His comrades' rejection of him appeared to be the last drop in the cup of his afflictions.

The home of his fathers lost to him, Master Ivie not seen for twelve long years, scarcely heard of for a long time past, and now these men with whom his special lot was cast closed the inner doors of their

hearts against him! Almost he was tempted to return, and declare a willingness to go any lengths they might desire.

We who live in these blessed and highly-favoured days, have scarcely even the faintest real idea what it is to live a life—the whole life remember—as thousands of these Covenanters did, in one ceaseless stream of persecution. In some ways it doubtless strengthened them, but it also presented to them many fierce temptations that we are not called upon to endure.

The Committee of Decision, as to the treatment of Carmichael, being reduced to the number of those who were like-minded on the subject, while some prayed or rested, one * of the number went to Cupar to watch Carmichael's motions. He returned at seven o'clock the next morning, the 4th. He had seen the man leave Cupar to go to hunt on Tarvit Hill. The twelve hastened forth to hunt him. But Carmichael had learnt that suspicious inquiries had been made as to his movements, and he gave up his hunting for that day. A diligent search was made to find him, but in vain.

They met a boy, and sent him to a little farm hard by, to make such innocent-sounding inquiries as might give them a clue, and he came back saying that the gudewife bade him tell them that the Archbishop's coach was approaching.

This was astounding news! Judas himself was

^{*} Burton's 'History of Scotland,' vol. vii. p. 210, and on.

coming in all the guilty state for which he had sold the Church of Christ. The paltry subordinate had been taken out of their hands, and the arch-traitor put in his place. They must slay him.

They had so wrought upon themselves by this time that they fully believed this unexpected event to be a sign from God, that He had delivered this enemy of theirs up into their hands. They dared not go back from the deed. If they did, the blood of all the Lord's people already slain—of all deaths and sufferings of the righteous that might follow—would be upon their heads.

And so the band of stern fanatics, with their sorrow-darkened minds, stood there, waiting for the man to drive up to them whom they meant to kill. A wild moor, that Magus Moor, and a wild group. And to make the coming scene more tragic and dismal in its awfulness—the Archbishop had his daughter as his travelling companion! Hard and cruel as the man was he loved his child, and she loved him. Those Covenanters might have spared the daughter such fearful memories.

But the carriage is coming on as quickly as the lumbering vehicles of that age could be made to move. There was a short halt at the village of Ceres, to take a social pipe with the parson of the parish. Then on again. The country had no scenery or culture to vary the desolate gloom of the flat Scotch moor. Some gloomy thoughts seem to have arisen in the Prelate's mind as he crossed it, and they seem to

have turned more on his child's prospects than his own.

As he passed the house of a known enemy he said: "There lives an ill-natured man—God preserve us, my child."

But there was quickly more visible cause for alarm. A horseman galloping furiously up to the carriage. A set, haggard face looking into it. Then a signal, the whole carriage surrounded by solemn resolute faces. Twelve men, some on horseback, some on foot, and all with firearms, which they discharged into the coach.

They struck down the attendants, stopped the horses, and still fired.

Believing their dire work at length fully accomplished they turned to depart, when, unhappily for their miserable victim, an incautious cry of his daughter's brought them back to make the discovery that he was not only still alive, but actually untouched! They felt that, to make the case quite clear, the Prelate had been long supposed to have a compact with the powers of darkness, and his having escaped all their shots proved the matter beyond gainsaying.

"The Evil One was notoriously known to have power of contracting with the lost souls he dealt in for exemption from the leaden bullet; but his power did not extend to 'the edge of the sword,' sanctified of old as the avenger of wickedness. They would kill him with that."

"Judas, come forth," they exclaimed, and they

enforced the fierce command by dragging him forth themselves, hacking at him as they did so.

His grandeur, his dignity, his haughtiness were gone now, fled to the winds. He was face to face with death in its most ghastly form, and he pleaded frantically for mercy—he would reward them—he would plead for them—he would do anything, everything they desired, if but they would spare his life.

But he had never shown mercy himself, and he received none. Because he had betrayed the Church as Judas, because he had wrung his hands these eighteen or nineteen years in the blood of the saints, he must die.

"Because he had been a murderer of many a poor soul in the Kirk of Scotland, and a betrayer of the Church, and an open enemy and persecutor of Jesus Christ and His members, whose blood he had shed like water on the ground, he should die."

And so he did die, after being hacked at by these excited ignorant swordsmen for three-quarters of an hour, and with one of the number holding back the poor daughter all that awful time in her agonized efforts to reach her father, and attempt to save him from death.

James Sharp, Archbishop of St. Andrews, was dead—quite dead at last—and then—there was an immediate search to find some token of his compact with the devil!

Such a fact sounds almost incredible to you and me, now. But you must recollect that those were days when a vivid superstition was alive even in the midst of the upper classes, while ten of this band of assassins were poor, ignorant peasants. And so they sought for the sign of black dealings, and in the dead man's tobacco-box they found a living humming-bee.

"James Sharp's familiar," said some; "a visible devil," said others. And they took their find, and their own explanation of it, as Mr. Burton says in this graphic account of his, as naturally as a geologist would take the finding of a fossil in the stratum where he expected it to be.

"The familiar, in the shape of a small living being easily disposed of was a belief common to the time. The creature was an agent or an ambassador from the prince of the powers of darkness ever at hand. Hence the German legend of the bottle-imp—a creature lying lethargic when the world is behaving well, but showing animation and activity when any mischief likely to promote its master's interest is brewing."

But enough of this sadly dark blot upon Covenanting history. Those who wish for more had better turn to Mr. Hill Burton's own most picturesque history. The limits of this tale are well-nigh outstept, and I have still to give you a few concluding words as to Ivie McCall, and his friend, Sir Henry Savile.



CHAPTER XXXVIII.

"THE CAMERONIANS."

OME fresh troubles for the Covenanters of course followed upon the death of Archbishop Sharp, but it was not until six years later, in 1685, during the short reign of

James II., that the final and fiercest wave of persecution threatened them well-nigh with annihilation.

"The black year," "the death year," "the bloody year," with these terribly significant names Scotch Presbyterians marked out that year 1685; and the report of its miseries, ere it was yet half through, reached Ivie McCall far away south, in Sussex.

McCall was a man of thirty-five now, tall and broad, and muscular. As amends for his splendid native air, of which he had been deprived, he had had the strong fresh breezes of a bold sea-coast, and he had thriven in them. From the commencement of his sojourn in the new land he had taken to the truest missionary work amongst the poor neglected fisherfolk along that shore. For miles upon miles stretching away on either hand the earnest-eyed young

Scotchman became known and beloved, and, as has been the case in other times of persecution, many a soul drawn from darkness into light, found cause to bless the Heavenly Father's mysterious ways of working for the diffusion of His Gospel into the unthought-of corners of the earth.

But Ivie had other pupils besides those who were poor and ignorant and toil-worn. The work begun in the heart of Henry Savile by Graham McCall was accomplished by the beautiful example of the son's life, and as years passed on Sir Henry disappeared entirely from the wild scenes of gaiety at Court, and became as well-known and welcome a visitor in the sea-washed huts and cabins as the Scotchman was.

The small Venice flask went with him always, filled with useful cordials made by the sympathizing hands of his sister and her daughters, who had likewise become of the number of Ivie McCall's most earnest and grateful Christian friends.

"I do believe, my uncle," said a fair niece one day smiling, as she handed back the refilled flask, "I do believe, uncle, that you love this queer little bottle as well as if it were a human being."

Sir Henry smiled also, but with a serious gravity, as he slipped it within an inner pocket. "I sometimes fear that I have almost an undue regard for it, Rachel," he replied gently. "But the first man who ever drank out of it led me, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, to drink of the Living Water which bestows everlasting life. He lay dying on a conquered

field. I was a companion in the discredit of the day, and in the bitterness of my youthful spirit I twitted him with his utter defeat. 'But nay,' said he, 'the Lord reckoned not victory and defeat after man's way of reckoning them.' He accounted Himself in the death for a righteous cause, a conqueror, and I myself, perchance, was granted also to Him, for a prize."

But into the midst of McCall's peaceful and useful life among Englishmen came the news of the heart-breaking struggles and sufferings of his Covenanted countrymen. All his soul was stirred within him. His mother had yielded up her gentle breath in his arms a year ago, he had no other absolute ties to keep him from his own people, and so, followed by tears and prayers and blessings, he set out, with scarcely twenty-four hours' delay, for his harassed and blood-bathed native land.

Savile was away at the time, but he no sooner returned to learn the cause of his friend's absence than he set off after him post-haste, showing as much vigour at fifty years of age as he had had at thirty. He came up with McCall in time to witness a scene of unexpected interest in connection with two of the characters of our tale.

The travellers had reached the brow of a hill, following the high road into the heart of the troubled districts. And simultaneously they checked their horses with a startled cry.

Late storms had washed away the continuation of

the road immediately before them, and they stood upon a brink, looking down into the burn below, now swollen into a wild and rushing torrent. And at the very instant of their gaining this spot a human figure, that of a boy it seemed from the small size, flung up its arms wildly, and fell back into the stream.

It was Birsy, the old cobbler.

Birsy had tracked James MacMichael at last—as he thought. But he had tracked him too closely now, in spite of all his anxious pains to avoid doing so. He had come, alone and unprotected, face to face with him he believed, and the shock was too much for his strained and aged nerves.

One gaze upwards at the giant figure of Sir Henry Savile, sitting up there, close above him, on horse back, surrounded by friends, one frantic glance round to see if there were dragoons at hand to protect him, and then with his brain reeling from fear he cast himself headlong upon one death to avoid the dreaded prospect of another. But while the informer was thus madly making a fatal escape from one he wrongly took for his enemy, the real MacMichael was close at hand.

Many and many a time he had been close enough to have laid violent hands upon the cobbler had he chosen, but the part he had taken in the assassination of the Archbishop had more than satisfied his inclinations for such horrible work, and now, as he witnessed the fall, from where he lay hidden in his damp and muddy lair beneath the bank, he dragged himself quickly forth, and plunged in to the rescue.

Leaving their horses in charge of the attendants, Ivie and Savile hastened down in their turn, to render what assistance they could for both. But as regarded Birsy, he was past aid. James MacMichael succeeded in bringing the body to the bank, but life was quite extinct, and he, himself, died at sunset from injuries he had received during his humane efforts.

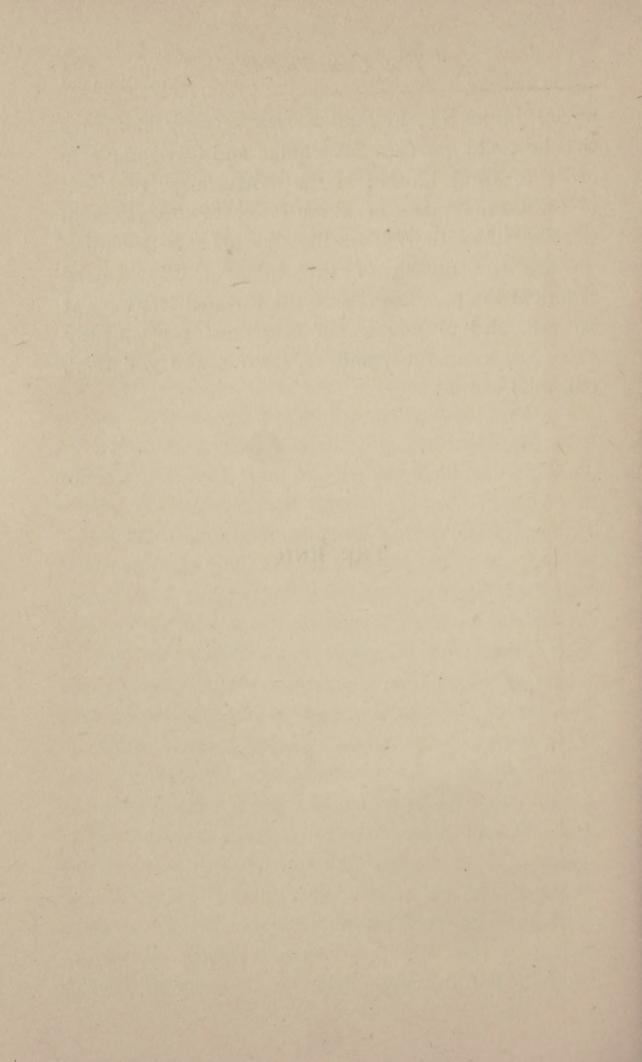
Already McCall's journey to Scotland was become of use, as he stayed beside the dying man leading his thoughts into gentler channels, his faith into a clearer holiness and love, than had belonged to the sad and stormy years of his later life.

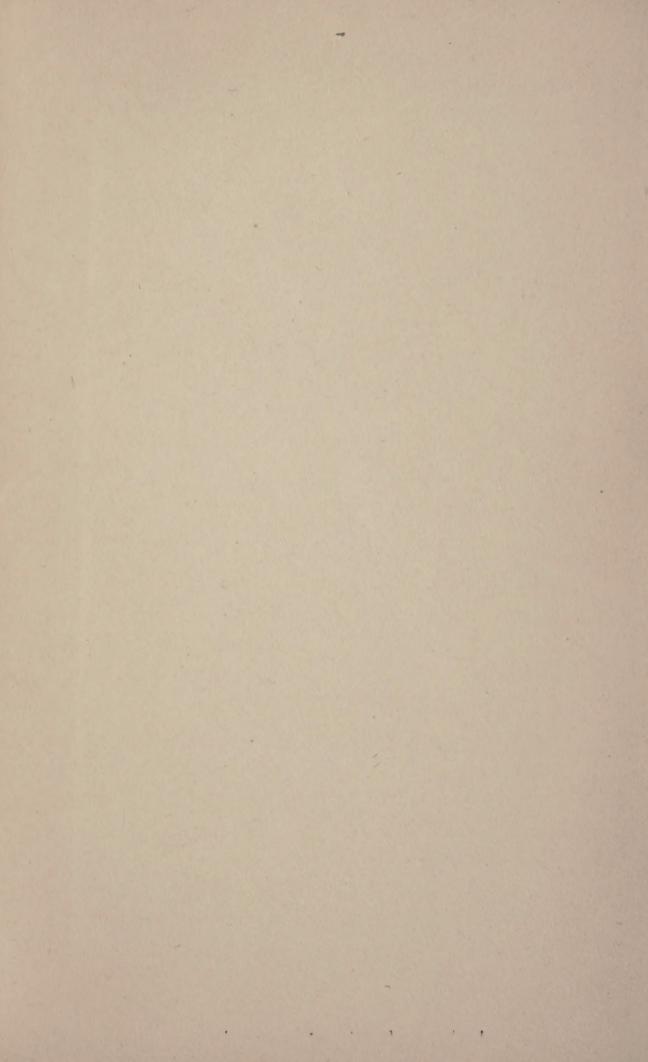
For Ivie himself, in spite of openly espousing his Cause, he escaped all the dangers of that terrible period of Covenanting history, sheltered in great measure by the perpetual watchfulness of his friend Savile, and the clever cunning of his friend's old English servant, Flemming, who still persisted, rather excusably under the trying circumstances, in running openly with the English hounds, and siding secretly with the Scotch hares. Innumerable were the clever and unsuspected rescues he contrived for many a poor helpless fellow playing hide-and-seek, now beneath the straw in a barn, now in a wool-sack, or a mealtub, from his persecutors. And when at length, in 1688, the Scotch united with the English in inviting William of Orange to come over and accept the British Crown, in place of his tyrannical Roman Catholic

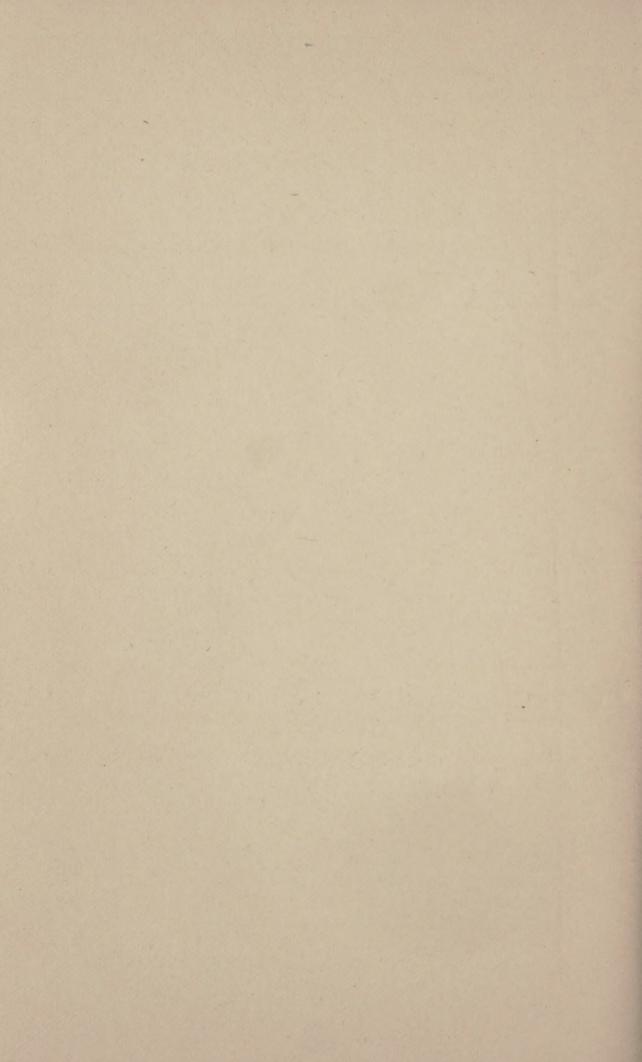
uncle, James II., Flemming was secretly half-sorry that he could not turn Scotchman and Covenanter, in order to enrol himself in the newly-raised regiment of the Cameronians, of which Ivie McCall was one of the Captains with William Blair for his aide-de-camp.

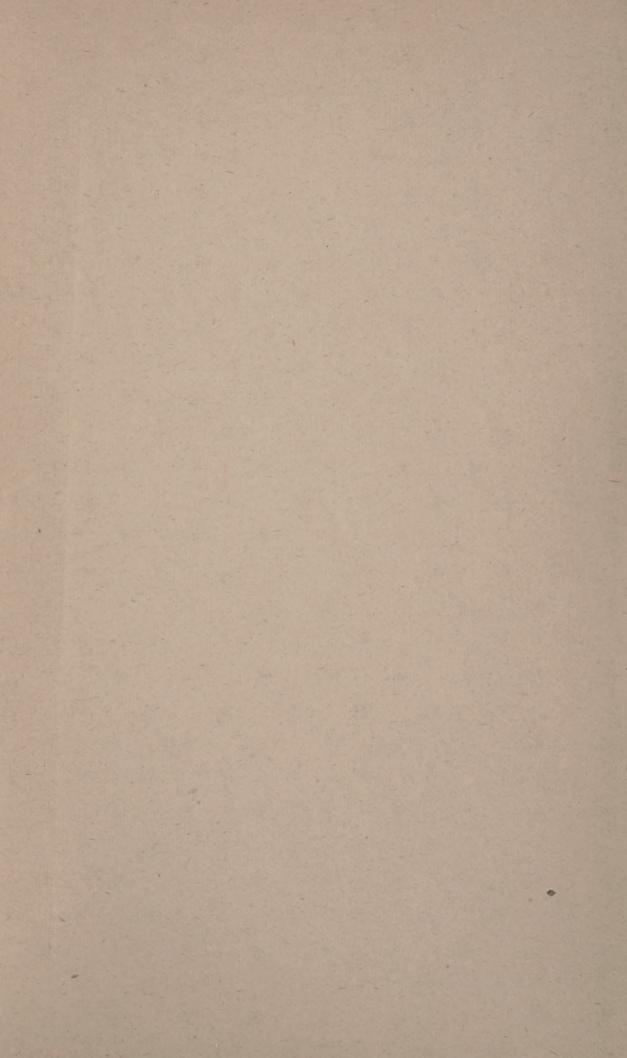
With the raising of this splendid Covenanters' regiment the persecutions of the Covenanters were at an end, and of course our tale must consequently share the same fate; and so, I write, and you read, two final words:

THE END.













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